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I Had to Know

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by

GLADYS BAKER



New York

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TO
Roy Leonard Patrick

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Part 1

1

Early Intimations in the Deep South

Two drives have dominated my life. A career of international journalism and a compelling desire to find that other world of Reality which mystics, poets and scientists of every age have found and affirmed with such clear conviction.

Of the latter I have always been aware.

Since childhood I have felt it shimmering there, within and about me, and there have been fugitive moments when the boundaries seemed to recede and I could almost reach out and touch it.

Beyond all objective pursuits I have been motivated to extend these ephemeral other-world glimpses to everyday consciousness and to search out answers to the wherefore of man's being, his fulfillment and ultimate destiny.

I believe with that growing group of perceptive intellectuals, whose voices are being lifted in every land, that the next step in evolution will be beyond the walls of materiality.

Even when life was at high noon I had intimations that pleasure, security and success would not always sustain me. For I came face to face, as do all of us—as did even Gautama—with those unavoidable anguishes for which all sentient humans must find reasonable answers. Some dear one dies. A friend breaks faith. An insurmountable barrier erects itself between you and the beloved who, you thought, had come to you across the seas of time. Intractable illness halts you in your tracks. Unpredictable events cancel the creative work into which you had poured your heart's essence. Or perhaps, worst of all, you are engulfed in *Weltschmerz*—the pain and sadness of the world.

And so while still absurdly young I realized the validity of Count Hermann Keyserling's words: "Unless we give equal attention to the soul's development, life will become so colorless and boring as to make existence not worth the while."

But what to do about it? Like many of our harassed moderns I discovered that the Green Pastures of philosophy and metaphysics were alien lands. My inherited church affiliations were too casual for an instant gushing forth of the fountainhead of faith. For me this was a starkly realistic business. The promise "seek and ye shall find" places emphasis on the seeking; "knock and it shall be opened to you" pre-empted an essential preparation before entering the House of Peace.

Because I was neither by nature nor environment a religious person, I suspected that in my case I should

have to knock and keep on knocking until my fists were bloody and my fingers numb. Here was a door not at once assailable even to the arrogance of youth. Here an enterprise requiring intense energy; courage of thought and action; a measure of detachment from the glamorous world I knew and loved; a rooting out of warm and intimate relationships which I seemed to need and treasure more than most. It would mean unwelcome disciplines and renunciations.

However, it finally came about that actually I had no other choice. For this inexpressible yearning for spiritual certainties was accelerated by a recurrent and somewhat shattering experience which might take me, inexplicably, at times of greatest happiness, achievement or despair:

I was isolated in a cold, blue void where neither light nor warmth could ever reach me.

Until at last I realized that this was the human soul speaking its own symbolic language much in the same manner that the unconscious uses the repetitious dream when some deep and vital problem must be resolved. Very well, I would follow its imperative command.

From the vast literature of philosophy and comparative religions I discovered that my own position was not unique. All through history there had been individuals in whom this fundamental longing had become so intense that they penetrated to a personal experience of God and Eternal Life. Since Truth is not confined to any age, I knew there must be people of our own times, somewhere, who had the answers—

warm, living people, distinguished men and women, whose reputation and accomplishment would testify to their integrity.

And so, early in my career as an interviewer of the world's great, I resolved to search them out.

I had to know.

Life had been graciously prodigal to me when judged by worldly standards. On a midnight of December the thirteenth I was born into surroundings typical of the deep South's storied traditions. White-pillared colonial house; an interior of quiet taste where the smell of waxed mahogany mingled with the scent of roses, jasmine and honeysuckle. Colored servants of dedicated service. Leisured and spacious living such as we war generations shall not know again. Typical, too, were my parents, blessed as they were with that indefinable Southern charm—a blend of warm responsiveness, gaiety and an engaging sense of humor. My brothers and sisters (two, each) were lively and fun-loving. I was the youngest child.

But even as a small girl I liked at times to sit quietly apart contemplating the formation of cloud patterns; meditating on the mystery of flowers, luminous-winged insects and grasses; the quality of sunlight in shadows. And always deep within a secret stirring of the life of the spirit.

Typical of the milieu in which we moved, we took our politics Democratic and our church Episcopalian. But you wouldn't have called my family even faintly religious. We went to church only for weddings and

christenings and, when it was a matter of *noblesse oblige*, attended an occasional funeral service. Certainly not an atmosphere to nourish the yearnings of an embryonic mystic!

Vividly etched in memory are two experiences of active opposition. At the age of seven or so, with a playmate from the "wrong side of the tracks," I paid a stealthy visit to the Catholic Church. For this I was not only soundly reprimanded but given a typically Protestant denunciation of Papists and—this I suspect was the graver error—of their being socially taboo!

Several years passed and this misdemeanor faded from my mind. Then occurred my second experience, having no connection with anything in my daily life. I had been put to bed. I remember quite clearly that small child's bed at the far side of the room I shared with my older sister. The lights were out but I had not gone to sleep. I could hear my brothers and sisters still at play beyond the open windows. Suddenly a Figure appeared at the foot of my bed. He was clad in a pure white robe and surrounded by a radiant golden aura. He stood silently looking down at me, dark eyes filled with infinite tenderness and compassionate love. I can still recall that timeless instant of ineffable bliss. Then the Figure vanished.

Impulsively I ran to find my parents to share with them this wondrous happening. No, they didn't laugh at me, but my father sat me upon his knee and patiently explained that "visions" didn't happen to "nice little girls" and that I was to go back to bed and sleep and above all not to mention what I "imagined" I

had seen, as my playmates would think I was queer.

I do not attach too much importance to this manifestation, but I was sure then as I am now that it was authentically supernatural.

As I grew into adolescence and young womanhood the Figure receded into the background of my mind. On the surface I was equally enthralled by the same pursuits as my young companions. I was healthy and popular too, I suppose, for I knew and liked everyone about me. By means of tutors and private schools I was given a careful, classical education. There were debutante balls and beaux. In that small fashionable world, society editors referred to me in those meaningless and outmoded clichés, "Southern belle and beauty." One hyperbolic description lingered with particular distaste as it made me sound like a cover girl on a box of chocolates. I was said to have: "Hair the color of ripe wheat, and violet eyes with sweeping dark lashes."

At seventeen a West Coast talent scout starred me in a motion picture with our Southern locale. The first night of "Society's Answer!" (the exclamation point is mine) at the Opera House was a gala evening. I sat in a box, clad in the sequin and tulle gown I had worn in the opening scene. I was asked to make a speech. It was great fun. The critics were loyally united in praise of their hometown talent and all my stagestruck companions were filled with amazement when I turned down a Hollywood contract.

Though I yielded to my parents' wish to launch me in society and entered into it gracefully enough on the

surface, I cherished even then a secret contempt for that sterile parasitic round of existence. I was the first of my little group to demonstrate this iconoclastic view by taking a job on the local newspaper. I learned the newspaper game the hard way, under what was then an exacting city room discipline and by holding every "beat" on the staff. It was exciting, absorbing and fitted whatever were my native talents and personality equipment.

But from the outset, opposition confronted me on every side. In my group the Junior League was the only acceptable means for worth-while activity. My need, however, was for full-time dedicated work—not the petit point embroidery, but the firm fabric which holds together all the brightly colored threads. This led to that first job on one of Florida's liveliest newspapers—*The Jacksonville Journal*.

So it came about that I presented myself at the office of our town's evening newspaper. The managing editor said he could use me as assistant to the society editor because of my "contacts." But I told him I wanted to learn reporting. Because he was shorthanded at the moment, he said he would give me a try.

The city editor was dead set against it and said I was to expect no pampering because I was the only female on his staff. He was a hard taskmaster.

Every morning I climbed out of bed at six and reported for duty at seven. It was winter and always dark and I often caught a ride downtown with the milkman. I didn't get breakfast at home. I had discovered that for fifteen cents I could have coffee and

toast with some of the reporters at a lunch counter near the office.

At three o'clock when the last edition had been put to bed I remained and practiced my typing—Now is THE TIME FOR ALL GOOD MEN TO COME TO THE AID OF THE PARTY—trying to master the two-finger technique used by all reporters in those days.

The city editor still resented having a female on his staff and believed that the managing editor had hired me only because of my family's position. He would dump all the rewrites and "obits" on my desk and, with the copy boy standing by to pull the pages out of my typewriter, would scream "*Copy!*" at me until my two operating fingers became thumbs. But I had determined on a journalistic career and refused to be discouraged.

I have had a great many thrills in my newspaper life but never any to equal that of the day I was handed my first pay envelope. I waited to open it. Since then I have walked through palaces, embassies and chancellories all over the world but never more proudly than I walked up Main Street that day. I was an individual. I was Somebody. I had earned money and had worked for it. I felt that the people I passed were all as curious as I about the contents of the envelope clutched in my hand. Reaching home I sought the shade of the magnolia tree where I was sure no one could see. I opened the envelope very carefully. There was a typewritten check for \$12.50. I thought I'd frame it, but I didn't. It went for a quite utilitarian raincoat.

For months it was a routine job. Then one day the reporter who covered the hotel run came back and said he was unable to get an interview with Anna Case, the concert singer who had given a program the night before. The city editor allowed as how he was a hell of a reporter and he'd better get that story or else.

I liked that reporter. He had tried to help me and had given me the life-saving sentence of "coming to the aid of the party." So when the C.E. wasn't around I told him I would go over and try to get the story for him at lunchtime.

The hotel clerk knew me because the debutante set went there to dances. Without hesitation he gave me Miss Case's room number but warned me not to reveal my "source of information."

Miss Case herself opened the door with the icy statement that she had left word not to be disturbed and especially by reporters. But I talked very fast and very earnestly and walked right in.

She smiled (later she said it was at my youthful determination) and invited me to lunch. I didn't take notes at that, my first interview, nor have I since. But I went back to the office, wrote the story and told my friend to add his byline.

It was then I learned the decency, the fine sportsmanship that exists among the newspaper fraternity the world over. That evening when I went home, my mother said, "There's a story written by you on the front page. I'm sorry they felt they must sign your name to it. I had hoped this job was just a passing whim."

I scarcely heard what she was saying. I grabbed the paper right out of her hands. There it was. My name, my very own name—in beautiful black type—signed to the story as my first byline. And not a word had been blue-penciled.

In my exultation I forgot my mother's embarrassment and also, to my shame, the friendly reporter for whom I was honestly pinch-hitting. Later I phoned him. He said: "It was a good yarn. You did the job and I couldn't take credit for it. So I gave it to the C.E."

"But what about your own job?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm fed up anyway—guess I'll be moving on to Memphis."

I knew perfectly well he was lying, that despite his brilliant reporting he had been fired from every first-rate paper in the South when he shifted from the habit of a strangling alcoholism to the vast consumption of spirits of ammonia. (A year later he was picked up dead in the street.)

The city editor never said a word to me the next day. But when Arthur Brisbane came to town I was assigned to the story. I had admired Brisbane as a glamorous and famous figure. Then I met the great Hearst editor and wrote about the disillusionment of finding him in shirt sleeves and red suspenders, never expecting, of course, that he would see the story.

But he did see it. And wrote back that I had the touch of humanizing personalities and offered me a job. Best of all, his practical courtesy sent an equally complimentary letter to my editor who in turn had it

printed. That Saturday I got a raise of three dollars.

I felt that I had discovered my *métier*, or what H. G. Wells later told me was one's "own peculiar gift," that of interviewing. My editors also recognized it, for I was given every interview assignment with famous people who stopped off in Jacksonville en route to the East Coast of Florida, which had become fabulous as a winter resort.

The next step was *The Birmingham News-Age-Herald* where that great editor Charles A. Fell created a job for me—special New York correspondent.

2

A Window Opens to Windows of the World

ON A stifling afternoon in mid-July I entered for the first time my furnished bed-sitting-room on Manhattan's West Side. I had taken what had been euphemistically described in the classified ads as a one room "apartment" with, to me, the dubious advantage of being located two blocks from an Express Subway. East Side, West Side, were all the same to me.

I was unaware that the friends I would later come to know would indicate with a tilted eyebrow at the mention of my address that New York also had its "wrong side of the tracks." Or that to be expected to climb five flights of steep, dark stairs would deter a second visit from my acutely horrified friends from the South.

I myself had been somewhat surprised that the front of the old brownstone building was occupied by shopkeepers. Cut-rate prices of a beauty parlor flared across the windows. And odors, a full block away,

announced the presence of what to me was cryptically labeled "Delicatessen Strictly Kosher."

My trim blue suit was wilted. Sticky perspiration mantled my neck and shoulders. Seeking relief at the one small window I was assaulted by a wall of torrid air rising from tar-oozing pavements. My first view was of interminable rooftops with row after row of wet clothes hanging limply from improvised clotheslines.

Later I was to love these and other rooftops with their sooty chimneypots—in London, Germany and Paris—and even grow to regard them as contributing "atmosphere" to the landscape.

But not now. Now I only stood disconsolately at the window trying to identify myself with the strange new surroundings. Then as such things happen, the rooftops dissolved (taking with them the clotheslines) and I saw instead the magnolia tree on the velvety green lawns back home. . . .

I was standing again in my father's library, as I had done on that last night he was ever to be there. I had not looked in the casket. I wanted to remember him, not in the conventional black and white of evening clothes, or in the ineradicable stillness of death, but to carry through the years the picture of a warm friend and companion.

He had been a kindly, genial man with a great heart and a smile that came readily in the face of all difficulties. The only respite he had had from being a good provider and respectable citizen was his books. And I had never been so happy as when I was allowed to go into his library.

It was my father's love of books that had got into my blood, making the small-town social life pale into a round of trivialities to which no thoughtful person could devote full time and loyalties. With scholarly selectivity, he had guided my reading.

On that last night I knew there was a Bible and the Episcopal prayer book on the topmost shelf. But in that hour when I felt myself cut off from the only security I had ever known, my eyes turned not to those but to the well-worn copies of Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, and Epictetus. There was no consolation just then in recalling the orthodox Scriptural passages concerning the dead: nor in the beautiful burial lines from the Book of Common Prayer.

So I only stood there quietly at some distance from the flower-banked bier and thought of him. In this leave-taking there were no tears despite my overwhelming grief. Nothing dramatic nor sentimental. We had not been demonstrative in life.

Then a strange thing happened. I experienced something so extraordinary, so imbued with Reality, that never again could I recall it without a sense of wonder and awe. It would not have been in the least unusual if I had felt my father's presence in the room whose very walls were permeated with his individuality. That might have been expected. But it was something more than that. Much more.

Suddenly it was as though I were lifted in angels' hands and transported into a completely deathless dimension. I felt my father's gaiety and aliveness. *But I felt it as my own.* The interior darkness of grief was

illuminated and lit from within and was no more. So tangible was this stepping-up of consciousness into realms of eternal life that I wanted to run to anyone who would listen, and say over and over again in startled amazement: "There is no death!"

But of course I didn't. Curiously, though, I lived in this atmosphere of intense inner happiness for days. Everyone noticed and remarked on my "courage and serenity." I, who the whole family had thought would be the most stricken, was able to give them solace and support—even my older brothers, who functioned so ineffectually from the blow, allowed me to attend to all the ordinarily depressing mechanics of burial. I went around the house lifting the drawn, dark shades and was impelled away from that place of mourning for long walks alone with a song in my heart and wings on my feet.

My father's death gave me the courage to break with home ties—which in the Deep South go very deep—and pursue my career. And here I was. . . .

I don't know how long I had been standing there lost in reverie. Darkness had settled over the rooftops. I turned away from that small drab window little dreaming that before very long I should be looking through the windows of the world.

I couldn't see then how many famous persons of different lands and faiths by some strange "linkedness of circumstances" would play a part in my Search. Some directly, others less so. Or that each would say the word—or would *not* say the word—which would set my feet, again, upon their appointed way.

3

From a "Walk-up" to the Stars

THAT first summer in New York I shall never forget.

I was on my own.

It wasn't long before I realized that I would have to branch out as a journalist—not only to augment my income but in order to reach my goal. With the confidence and independence of "one-and-twenty," I neither expected nor wanted help.

My contract called for a full-page interview for the Sunday edition of my Southern paper. My editor trusted my news sense to make my own assignments with celebrities most prominent in the newslight. So encouraging was the response from fan-mail and (more important) from my editor, that I offered the feature to other nonconflicting newspaper territories in the South.

This resulted in building up my own small syndicate. My member papers included: *The Birmingham News-Age-Herald*; *The Dallas News*; *The Charlotte Observer*; *The Atlanta Constitution* and *The Jacksonville Journal*.

For a while my thoughts and time and energies were all dedicated to my work. An instinctive love of books, music and art served me well. I haunted the museums; listened to great music under starlit skies at Lewisohn Stadium; attended lectures at summer college courses and kept *au courant* with national and international affairs. I mastered the city's complicated maze of subways and buses and learned to cope with the daily mechanics of existence.

Always and forever I was thrillingly aware of the teeming metropolis whose pulse beat seemed attuned to my own. After the picture-postcard prettiness of the South, my sense of beauty was fulfilled by New York's mercurial moods. Dark wet pavements under the blurred amber of streetlights; the dramatic contrast of its Park Avenue elegance and the sordid, coarse ugliness of Third. The foreign sections with their exotic colors and smells and crowded warm humanity. The jeweled necklaces spanning its two rivers—each with its distinct personality; and at night, the lighted pinnacles shrouded in mists or thrusting to a starry, cobalt sky.

Even so, I was living a curiously anomalous life. Except for my professional contacts, I had no friends.

At home I had also been accustomed to having neighbors run in at all hours. I didn't know that no group remains as much stranger to one another as do the residents of an urban apartment house.

Twilight to me has ever been the hour of the most poignant longing—human and spiritual. It was during this time that I often found myself at the close of the

day in a Roman Catholic church. How I knew it was there I do not know, for it was tucked in among the old brownstone houses in West Seventy-First Street.

Lighted only by the flickering candles before the altars and the irised light from stained-glass windows, I found myself quite naturally on my knees, and while I knelt in the incensed dusk I felt a deep serenity.

One evening I went to Barbara Young's Poetry House. I had been notified that some of my poems would be read on one of her programs.

But they were not read that night. And I had returned, disconsolately, to my apartment.

In my jack-in-the-box kitchenette I was preparing some hot chocolate when there came a cautious tap on my door. Without thinking, I sped to open it.

A handsome young man stood there, smiling shyly. All in one breath he said he had noticed me in the corridors, had heard me speak to the superintendent, that he also was from the South and would I please have a glass of champagne?

Dire warnings from my mother flooded my consciousness, a repetitious theme song: "Never allow a strange young man, not properly introduced, to enter your apartment." And I—Heaven forgive me!—smiled sweetly, said thank you, I would love to talk about the South, and would he please come in.

In those days I did not drink. For two reasons: I agreed with Tennyson that a writer must be in command of all five senses, and even of a sixth if he could command it. Also, in some of my reading on the training of the life of the spirit I had learned that alcohol

coarsens and blocks the delicate linkages with the world of Reality. Even so, the evening ended as any young woman less naïve than I would have expected.

Through this and other unpleasant happenings, and the vast emptiness of my personal life, my resolve was shaken.

I wanted to go home.

The next morning I impulsively mailed a letter to my editor asking to be reinstated in my old job. Yet I suffered from a consuming sense of defeat.

In the early afternoon the phone rang. It was Barbara Young. Though I had not met her, I had read her mystical poems which appeared regularly in *The New York Times* and she had become one of my favorite poets. It was only because my own verse in those days was on the same subject that I had had the rashness to submit it. Though some of the poems had appeared in anthologies and other places, I was quite humble about them, and in the cover-note I had said I was a journalist, not a poet.

"I am calling you today, my dear," she said, "to ask if you will come to tea with me. Also to tell you that you *are* a poet."

On such small gracious acts, sometimes, our destiny is determined.

Barbara Young and I sat sipping iced tea on a balcony in her Greenwich Village apartment overlooking her Tree of Heaven. In her beautiful contralto voice she talked with me of spiritual truths and I was again brought back to my resolve to pursue my Search.

That evening I sent a wire to my editor: "Please

return letter unopened." He did, and I still have it in my scrapbook.

With this decision, the way seemed clear again. My two objectives shone forth like twin mountain peaks high above the mist of my previous bewilderment.

The Search, yes, this would always and forever go on until it was, somehow, brought to fulfillment. But I knew that it was for me tied in with my career of journalism. I realized of course that not all the celebrities in the news who were interviewable "copy" would be the illumined souls I longed to meet. But might not *some* of them hold out the Ariadne thread leading to the Hidden Treasure?

And then, there was the work itself—the kind of work each one of us is best equipped to do. Even when it had not been necessary for economic reasons, I had sensed the psychological value of work to the individual. For me—the natural introvert and contemplative—to be of any use to myself or others, a daily schedule of accomplishment was essential to a sane and balanced perspective.

So like "A. E.," the Irish mystic, I, too, "would move among men and places and in living I would learn the Truth at last."

My social life expanded.

In comparison with my first lonely memories, my life now seemed glamorous beyond the dreams of that small-town newspaper girl I once had been. To the gratification of my early friends, I had moved from the

West Side walk-up to a more "correct" address on the upper East Side.

I interviewed H. L. Mencken, whose iconoclastic blows against all morals and mores had his name on every tongue. From then on, whenever he came to New York from Baltimore he invited me to dine with him. Mencken, the gourmet and *bon vivant*, initiated me into epicurean dining. The choosing of a proper vintage wine for every course was an elaborate ritual.

At the 21 Club we sat at the red and white gingham-covered tables downstairs reserved for celebrities. (Tourists were shunted upstairs to the spotless, uninteresting damask.) Our table was the mecca of the literati.

We went often to Moneta's in Mulberry Street. Mencken admired Papa Moneta's cellar and Papa Moneta admired Mencken. And to the Lafayette for mussels with which the only possible drink was chilled Montrachet.

But it was at Luchow's, in Fourteenth Street, that the Baltimore savant enjoyed himself most. No matter where we dined it was there we finished the evening. Eddie Fink, the piano player and leader of the three-piece orchestra, signaled the entrance of their most famous patron by a robust rendition of *Tales from a Vienna Wood*.

Over innumerable steins of beer and hearty servings of *Sauerbraten* or *Knockwurst*, Mencken reverted to the genial Teutonic burgher of his forebears. During the May Wine season going to Luchow's was to

him a pilgrimage. As everywhere he drew everyone. But here his satellites were a particularly mixed company, including a Jesuit priest; Poet Edgar Lee Masters, perennial habitu  of Luchow's; and a beaming circle of waiters. Long after all the other tables were deserted, the faithful Eddie Fink considered it an honor to remain playing sentimental German *Lieder* for the archsophisticate—Henry L. Mencken.

All my friends envied me my evenings with the most discussed writer of our day. They imagined we were occupied in literary talk. Mencken talked all right. He began talking the moment he called for me, continued talking in the taxi, and kept on talking way into the night until time to deposit me at the door of my apartment house. What my friends did not know was that the unpredictable Mencken never talked shop! For hours he would hold forth on his favorite topic, wines—every wine of every country and of every vintage; his favorite hobby, music—the music he and his Baltimore friends assembled weekly to play with the not-too-expert Mencken at the piano; his ideas of a better strategy which should have been employed at the Battle of Gettysburg.

And I listened. . . .

I often wondered why so celebrated a personage as Mencken chose to squire me about, for basically we were not especially congenial; our tastes and ideals were miles apart. He was a sworn enemy of all religion and I so eager, even then, to find the Truth that I even asked him at my first interview why he lambasted the Bible Belt. His answer was that all religious persons

were phonies. And when I wanted to know if it were really true that he didn't believe in immortality, he said he knew of no idea more depressing, especially if they had Prohibition in Heaven—that alcohol was the only thing that made life tolerable.

Mencken liked the interview and continued taking me out after it appeared. Finally, I found out why. It was, I felt sure, due to an accomplishment which grew out of Foreign Correspondent Zoë Beckley's coaching when I told her of my ambition for a European career and regretted the fact that I spoke so few languages.

"But it is not important for an interviewer of celebrities," she said, "to speak foreign languages—the only important thing is to keep silent in *all* languages!"

So I had become an expert in listening. I listened—and Mencken kept right on talking.

This association lasted until eight years ago when I wrote him that I was to be married to a Vermonter. He replied with a telegram which was pure Menckenia: "Don't do it. Those Vermonters won't give you anything to eat except moose meat and maple syrup."

In addition to writing for my Southern papers I was asked to do a syndicated serial—*Sallie's Temptations!* It was fast money and I carried Sallie, cliff hanging, from one batch of chapters to another, scarcely remembering what went before. To my horror the syndicate reported that my "public" demanded a sequel to Sallie. And other syndicates bid for my services; but no amount of money could have lured me from my first love—interviewing the great.

And this I continued to do for the next five years.

They were full years, successful years and, in many ways, happy years. But they were, in the last analysis, unrewarding. If I could be said to have been living in any one world, it was the world of arts and letters. But no representative of this world had offered me the answer I was seeking.

Yet I knew that after all it was a Search to which I was committed and that I would have to set my sails to catch God's whispering breeze wherever it might be rising.

Perhaps the world of science held my answer.

4

I Go to the Scientists

"SCIENCE gives us plenty of ground for intelligent hope that our physical life is only a stage in the existence of the soul. The law of continuity and the general scientific view of the universe tend to strengthen our belief that the soul goes on existing and developing after death."

Professor Michael Pupin, Serbian herdsboy who became one of the world's leading scientists, was disposing of the popular fallacy that science is drawing men away from God. With Euclidian clarity, as though stating an axiom of mathematics before his Electro-Mechanics class at Columbia University, he expressed his faith.

These were impressive words from a man whose thinking and achievements were eminently practical. To Pupin we owe the loading coil making possible the range of the long-distance telephone; the combination of the fluorescent screen with X ray; and numerous other inventions profoundly influencing our daily lives.

Pale March sunlight slanted across the broad oak desk strewn with books and drawings. Although he had celebrated his seventy-third birthday, and a lingering disease had reached its climax, he had kept at his work.

Continuing, he said, "It would be pleasant, I think, to leave this beautiful world while the sun is shining, but I have no dread of death. After all, Heaven is what scientists call the Real World of which this present world is only a picture. Actually, all scientific research and investigations are directed towards further revelation of the world beyond. As a matter of fact, all of this present world that we know anything about is perceived through the senses. We see a sunset, a rainbow, the stars, the new green of spring; we hear bird-song; smell the perfume of the rose; we taste; we feel—but it all leads to glimpses of another world. It is this other world that is called Heaven."

The scientist's intimations of immortality began when, as a small boy, he guarded his father's sheep in the pasture lands of his native Idvor. During the long summer nights he contemplated the stars and in the distance heard the reverberating tolling of church bells.

"It seemed to me then," he recalled, "that light and sound were divine methods of speech and so two questions: 'What is light? What is sound?' filled my waking thoughts and penetrated my dreams."

He apologized for the interruption of his laboratory assistant bearing a report on one of the Pupin inventions.

When the door was closed his resilient mind turned back at once to the theme of our talk. With an impish twinkle he said: "Ah yes, we were making Heaven respectable again from the scientific viewpoint!" Then in a serious, straightforward manner he affirmed his conception and belief in God.

"Wherever science has explored the universe, it has found it to be a manifestation of a co-ordinating principle; a definite, guiding principle which leads from chaos to cosmos. I choose to believe in this co-ordinating principle as a Divine Intelligence rather than that the cosmos is the result of haphazard happenings. We can place utmost faith in this Divine Intelligence. Dependability and continuity are everywhere present in the universe.

"All around me every day I observe its direction," he continued. "In the stars, each moving in its own pathway; in the movement of the earth rotating on its course these millions of years; in the infant who develops into a full grown, self-directing individuality. Does it not seem obvious that there is some directing intelligence behind all this?"

"Yes," I replied, "but where do you think this intelligence resides?"

"Why, in the soul of man—in that great world within us Divinity resides."

"But when you say the soul of man, Professor Pupin, just what do you mean?"

"As a man of science I can state that we recognize in this life three activities of the soul—the intellectual, the aesthetic and the spiritual. And so it seems to me

that the soul of man is the greatest thing in the whole universe—the highest purpose of God's creative energy. The stars are only a beginning of this energy. But the human soul, in so far as science can penetrate, is the last chapter of this history as far as it has been written."

"And do you think the soul of man is immortal?"

"I do," he replied. "In biology man is revealed as a being who is constantly progressing from glory to glory, changing more and more, I believe, toward the spiritual image of his Creator.

"Now, after God has spent untold time in creating man and endowing him with a soul which is the reflection of His image, is it reasonable to suppose that man lives here on earth for a brief span and then is totally extinguished by death? That the soul perishes with the physical body? That it existed in vain?"

"Then you don't believe that science is drawing men away from God?"

He answered. "The real purpose of science is not merely to make material things, inventions to increase wealth and comfort. If science doesn't help to give me and others a better faith to live by, a better understanding of the Creator, a closer relationship to God so that I can better carry out the divine purpose, then, as a man of science, I am a failure."

A few days following my talk with the great physicist came announcement of his death. I was glad the sun was shining.

My story was syndicated. On the late afternoon of

its publication (in New York it had been carried by *The New York Times*) I was alone in my apartment. Except for the late roundup of world news and occasionally, classical music, I seldom touch the radio.

Suddenly something seemed to compel me to put aside a book in which I was absorbed, walk into another room and turn on the dial. My attention was arrested by hearing my name. Edwin C. Hill, broadcasting on a national network, was quoting highlights from my Pupin interview—those concerning the scientist's proofs of immortality.

Later the syndicate editor reported that the demand for reprints of my "soul story" broke all their records. This made me realize that for many the only convincing approach to the realm of the spirit is through the postulates of reason. The hope that I too might be convinced spurred my quest for further investigation in this field. And so I listened to other voices from the frontier of modern science:

Albert Einstein:

"God is as valid as a scientific argument."

Sir James Jeans, noted English physicist and astronomer:

"The universe can best be pictured as consisting of pure thought."

Arthur H. Compton, American physicist, joint winner with C. T. R. Wilson of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1927:

"We feel that we are an essential part of a great enterprise in which a mighty Intelligence is working out his hidden plan."

Robert A. Millikan, noted winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1923:

"The inner structure of matter is reducible to an essential and immortal energy."

Charles P. Steinmetz, electrical wizard:

"The greatest scientific discovery will be made along spiritual lines. Then the scientists of the world will turn their laboratories over to the study of God and prayer. When this day comes the world will see more advancement in one generation than it has seen in the last four."

The words of these men gave clear evidence that that scientist is obsolete who, because he cannot observe the soul with test tube and microscope, denounces the intangible forces of the Spirit. And from the passionate conviction with which this thought was variously expressed, I could not doubt that it had given great reassurance to the scientists themselves.

But they were men of genius. What about less gifted mortals? What about me? They had failed to show me a *modus operandi*—a technique by which I might attain to equally convincing experience.

I must continue my search.

The syndicate venture I had initiated to serve the group of Southern newspapers had proved successful. I had interviewed hundreds of celebrities as they

pirouetted in the newslight. This aroused my ambition to be a foreign correspondent.

So I presented myself to the editor of the North American Newspaper Alliance, a syndicate serving important newspapers throughout the world, including *The New York Times*. I proposed to him that I go to Europe to fetch the difficult and desirable interviews on which his own veteran correspondents had failed.

It was spring, 1936. Already war clouds were piling up over Europe. My list included key figures in the impending catastrophe; Mussolini, Hitler, Chancellor Schuschnigg of Austria, Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish dictator (who up to this time had never granted a press interview and who would be the prize scoop of the Balkans), and many more.

The NANA editor roared with laughter at what he apparently considered my audacity.

But in the end I sold him. He gave me a reluctant carte blanche but no expense account.

I was on my own.

But I was off—a foreign correspondent with a hunch for what was going to be headline news in the dawn of an ominous decade.

5

At the Court of Kemal

THE American Ambassador sat facing me at his desk in the high-ceilinged study of the embassy in Istanbul. "I am sorry," he said, "but it will be impossible for us to help you. Ever since Atatürk became Dictator of the new Turkey he has kept himself inflexibly aloof from interviewers."

According to etiquette I had properly presented myself and my credentials to my own country's representative. What he told me was not news. It was common knowledge that ever since the Soldier-Revolutionary had chased the Sultan out of Turkey and turned Turkey upside down in the most torrential revolution of history, he had consistently refused—and for twelve years—to see the press.

"But, Mr. Ambassador—"

He interrupted me with an oblique glance at the mail stacked in front of him. "Since all regular channels are closed to you, I feel it my duty to suggest that any prolongation of your stay in Turkey with the intention of forcing the issue, would be most inexpedient."

I said: "Be assured that I shall cause you no embarrassment, Mr. Ambassador; but sometimes the gods of journalism have a way of working their magic without the aid of the diplomatic service. I will remain in Turkey."

With a lift of chin and shoulders and with high heels clicking a tattoo on parquet floor, I followed the butler through wide oaken doors and I had the feeling (though I was very wrong) that these doors had opened for the last time on a determined young woman who had come half way across the world to accomplish the impossible.

Later that week, seated on the balcony of my room at the Parc Hotel overlooking the incredibly blue Sea of Marmora, my bravado vanished.

Why did I linger in this land whose very atmosphere breathed strangeness to my soul? Had there been a hint of danger in the kindly intentioned Ambassador's advice to leave Turkey? What, after all, did I know about the Turks whose blood-spattered history was filled with massacres of Christians and Islamic fanaticisms?

Zero hour. Then into my thoughts boomed a 21-gun salute announcing, of course, the arrival of a famous personage.

I flew to the telephone and said to the clerk: "Please send up the afternoon paper."

On the front page there were two pictures. One of them was the American journalist who had come to interview the Ghazi. The other was of Kemal himself announcing his arrival from his capital, Ankara.

Somewhere I had heard that this regal personage came occasionally, while in residence at the Palace in Istanbul, to dance on the terrace of the Parc Hotel.

I was again on the phone: "Could you tell me, please, is the President expected here this evening?"

"The Ghazi never reveals his plans, Madame. If he comes, it is usually around midnight."

"Do your guests dress for dinner?"

"Oh, no, Madame, during the summer we are most informal."

And so at ten o'clock that evening I put on my most formal and becoming evening gown.

The maitre d'hôtel placed me at a small table. I selected it not for its vistas of moonlit gardens, but for its full view of the long, conspicuous table always held in readiness for the chance visit of the Great Man. The terrace was crowded with casually attired members of the American colony and with the elite of Istanbul—all obviously bent on catching a glimpse of him.

Then suddenly it happened.

A fleet of cars swept up to the entrance. Generals, staff officers, diplomats, an aide-de-camp, alighted. There was a flurry of waiters, a scraping of chairs and instantly everyone was on his feet.

At the head of the group strode a single stocky figure, who looked neither to the right nor to the left. He was wearing a plain dark business suit, yet the glittering uniforms and all the distinguished men who wore them were obliterated. His was the air of one who walks alone.

At the head of the flower-decked table his gaze swept the room, paused inquiringly on each individual. His eyes met mine and rested briefly, then he turned to speak with the man who stood beside him.

Never had I known such tumultuous excitement.

To hide my nervousness I sat staring at the menu. Then a voice spoke beside me. I turned. An aide-de-camp stood at my elbow: "The President," he said, "presents his compliments to the American journalist and he begs her to do him the honor of joining his party."

So! I approached him in a happy daze.

Kemal arose, offered a firm handclasp, indicated the chair to his right. He eyed me appraisingly. "*Très gentille—très gentille.*" He smiled. "You have a saying which is more ours than yours about the mountain going to Mahomet—and so, Bayan Gladys, I am here. We shall drink. We shall dance. Ah, *très gentille!*"

"I am sorry, Your Excellency," I had to say to him, "I do not drink, and while I should like very much to dance, you must know that my one purpose in being in Turkey is for a very important interview."

"Ah, that! It can wait. Tonight I am on holiday. Come," and he swept me to my feet. The orchestra swung into his favorite waltz tune, the romantic "Love's Last Word Is Spoken, Chérie."

The other dancers withdrew, for it is an unwritten command that no other couple appears while the President is dancing.

Back at the table I mentioned some of the questions which for months had clamored to be answered.

His opinion of the tense state of international affairs; Turkey's position as the key country in the Mediterranean; whether or not he had broken the Treaty of Lausanne and was fortifying the Dardanelles; his revolutionary reforms which had changed the mental habits of hundreds of centuries—his personal tastes and habits—the inner forces which had led the son of a poor Macedonian Turk to become absolute dictator of fourteen million Turks.

But he would have none of it. With a brusque gesture he said, "Later will come the serious questions. But tonight we must spend in getting acquainted. Waiter, refill the glasses!"

"But, Your Excellency, this may be our only opportunity. You may change your mind about it later."

"No, no. Already I have plans. Yes. Tomorrow night you shall dine with me at the Palace. We will go on my yacht to Prinkipo, beautiful island faraway in the sea of Marmora—in my private car to my capital, Ankara."

Deep within me some instinct ran up a danger signal.

With my background of rugged "city-room" training, as a reporter I was neither coy nor naïve, but I recalled tales of Kemal's relations with women inevitably linked with his name.

Intuitive, he sensed my agitation. "Ah, you are thinking it would not be *comme il faut*. Do not fret. I am not unaware of the American conventions. My sister Macbuley will act as chaperon."

Then I relaxed. For this fine woman had stood with

Kemal throughout his tumultuous career and was now his companion and hostess.

"That is much better," he seemed pleased that he had put me at ease. "You will see that I keep my promises, but you wish to write about me and I cannot dispose of my heart and mind to a stranger. You must be my friend, for I have few friends—only those with whom I can be myself."

While he sat sipping his raki I observed him closely. His appearance was astonishingly unlike the typical Turk. His complexion was clear and tanned, not swarthy; the hair tawny and brushed to immaculate smoothness. In his eyes, pale yet curiously vivid, lay the secret of the Ghazi's hypnotic power.

Whether listening or talking, the heavy brows were restless, lifting to Mephistophelean peaks and drawing together to trench deep lines in an amazingly broad forehead. From high cheekbones the face narrowed to a clean-cut, stubborn chin. The mouth was straight and hard. When amused, a fleeting smile softened its corners, but I never heard him laugh out loud.

The orchestra was packing up its instruments. A waiter was dispatched to command its return after a recess to play until morning!

Kemal's capacity for entertainment was insatiable. We danced—every dance. Later, we repaired to another freshly laid table in a private room for breakfast, which, like all his meals, was prepared by the Palace chef to guard against poisoning. An exotic meal, course after course of unpronounceable dishes,

starting with native bean soup and caviar, followed by a Turkish version of braised beef. This followed by rice with almonds and raisins, the whole topped off with sweet lemon jelly!

Breakfast over, the President reached for his never-empty glass of raki, downed it with a quick gulp, clapped his hands, and three native musicians emerged from an anteroom. They unslung their instruments and squatted on the floor. The strings quivered in a half harmony of dissonant chords.

Into the room whirled a Turkish dancing girl, her lithe nakedness dimly concealed by veils and barbaric jewels. Her dark hair was loose; her lips a slash of crimson against her dusky face; her eyes smoldering. Faster and faster she moved to the mounting tempo of the music, bending and swaying in an ecstasy of rhythm. A lustful, pagan dance that stirred savage tides in the blood. Kemal leaned forward, pale eyes glittering. But when, at a final crashing chord, she sank breathless to the floor, they grew cold again, his face immobile.

He drew a rose from the cluster before him, tossed it casually at her, pushed back his chair. Early morning sunlight streaming through the windows etched the strong face in sharp relief. I looked for signs of fatigue. There were none. Fifty-eight years had only hardened his physical vigor.

He said with a quick smile:

"Have you ever known a ruler who works as hard as I work, and who, when he plays, can be quite so gay!"

That noon I was awakened by the persistent clang of the doorbell. Flinging on a negligee, I opened the door, not to a bellboy but to an imposing delegation! Two Deputies from Parliament; Kemal's private secretary; behind them native servants who filed into the room each bearing mysterious packages. "Little souvenirs," I was told, "representative of Turkish arts and crafts." The contents disclosed hundreds of hand-wrought silver bangles; exotic perfumes; filmy iridescent scarves; rugs, with the soft jewel tones of Turkey's most noted industry.

The secretary presented a letter from the President's sister. True to his word he had summoned her from Ankara, and with Oriental courtesy she apologized for not paying an official call but would greet me that evening.

The rest of the afternoon I assembled my wardrobe. What did one wear to dine at a palace? There was not much choice. I chose my other evening gown—a slim sheath of cloth of gold with formal train and a cape of crimson velvet.

When the President's car was announced I was detained by a phone call. The Embassy extended an invitation to a ball that evening. One of the secretaries would call for me. I hope I didn't sound smug when I replied that I was dining as Kemal's guest, at the palace.

I was whirled through the crooked, cobbled streets of Istanbul and into the broad chestnut-bordered avenue. Behind high barricaded walls concealing all but its topmost turrets was Dolma Bagtche curving its

white marble length along the shore of the Bosphorus. Two military guards presented arms and the car swept through green formal gardens and drew up before the wide steps.

I was ushered into the vast reception hall. Long vistas of rooms led away as far as eye could reach. My escort was bowing me into the intimate apartment where many kings and queens had been received as the Sultan's special guests.

My host, in flawless evening clothes, rose to greet me and presented his sister, Macbuley. A large, deep-bosomed woman with kind cordiality kindling her expressive dark eyes. Introductions followed to a dozen other guests; the Turkish Ambassador to Greece, Kemal's Minister of the Interior, all hand-picked from his cabinet and diplomatic corps.

Dinner was announced. The long Renaissance table was strewn with roses and set with the large gold service plates from which centuries of sultans had dined; an array of knives and forks of the same precious metal, ponderously heavy. In front of our places were six cut-crystal wine goblets and one of ruby glass. At intervals along the board, gold shells were heaped with exotic hors d'oeuvres and pale pink strawberries. Of the phalanx of butlers, three assigned to the President's special service watched his every gesture; sprang to refill his glass and to light the gold-tipped, monogrammed cigarettes.

Through tall windows draped with Hereke damask, his eyes wandered over the tranquil Bosphorus where

his yacht rode at anchor, a dark shadow against the flickering lights of Asia Minor. My gaze swept the salon with its gilt chairs upholstered in crimson and white, the satin lustrous under thousand-prismed candelabra; lingered for a moment on the arabesque sideboards inlaid with mother-of-pearl; regarded the priceless rugs on gleaming parquet floor.

"What do you think of it?" asked Kemal.

"I am afraid I do not like palaces, Your Excellency. They are too big and cold." Even then I was regretting that my wrap was deposited in a room that seemed miles away.

This honest and apparently unexpected comment brought a wry smile to the corner of his mouth. "I do not like palaces, either," he said. "I am a simple man."

I asked him if he had ever dreamed that one day he would come to live in the palace. The muscle in the lean cheek flicked, as the jaw tightened: "I had no dreams, but I visualized everything. Day and night I saw it all, planned it all. Once when I was a student I sat drinking raki with two of my superior officers. I told them Turkey must be freed from foreign domination and corrupt government. They agreed, but wanted to know who would do it. I told them I would do it and they threw back their heads and laughed. They thought I was mad."

I regarded that strange, sad face. "Are you happy, now?" I asked.

"Yes, because I am successful, and because I attained that success through my own efforts. No power

beyond myself, no human being ever helped me . . .” he broke off suddenly. “No, that is not true. There was one person who helped me—a woman.

“That woman,” he went on, “was my mother. At first she opposed me. She wanted me to be a Moslem priest, but when I was nine I decided to be a soldier so that I could help my country.

“I yearned to enter the military school at Salonika, but I couldn’t enroll without my mother’s consent. She locked me in my room for five days, hoping I would abandon the idea. But whenever she paused at my door she heard me marching up and down, issuing commands, rallying my imaginary army.

“On the evening of the fifth day,” he recalled, “my mother had a dream. She saw a boy seated upon a golden platter on a minaret in Istanbul. And a voice said: ‘He is one chosen to lead his people.’ The following morning she opened the door and gave her consent.”

A brusque gesture of his expressive hands, and this rarely mentioned phase of his life was returned to the past.

I asked why he disliked being called a dictator.

“They say I have power, and I have,” he mused. “There is nothing I want to do that I cannot do. But to me a dictator is one who imposes his will. I do not wish to be brutal. I like best the name the people have given me—‘Atatürk,’ Father of the Turks.”

As he talked someone began playing a piano in the anteroom. He told me he was fond of music and that the pianist was a young student at the American Col-

lege who came each evening to play during the dinner hour.

Of his many reforms the liberation of the Turkish women was perhaps the most spectacular. He spoke earnestly of this emancipation.

"From the shadow of Islam, the Turkish woman has stepped into the sunlight. We have cast aside the shrouding charshaf and veil, and with them an intolerable slavery. She now enjoys equality with men. All fields of activity are open to her."

I was to discover that not the least of Kemal's charm was his sense of humor and enjoyment of an amusing situation.

As we talked the hours sped by. I saw by my wrist watch that it was well after midnight and coffee was yet to be served. Also, I recalled that it was not uncommon for Kemal to sit at table until dawn. First casually, then desperately, the American journalist tried to fathom the proper procedure when a lady desired to "powder her nose." Confiding my quandary to the aide-de-camp on my left, I was told by that conventional young man that etiquette forbade anyone leaving the table while the Dictator was talking. And I realized that, with each drink of raki, His Excellency was likely to keep right on talking *ad infinitum*!

Finally, with as much dignity as could be summoned in trailing cloth of gold, I rose abruptly and fled the room, only to be pursued on such a very private errand by a corps of butlers who insisted on serving as a personal escort to the President's own private apartment. When I emerged, as stealthily as

possible, I was met outside the door by the same retinue, lined up in military formation; one offering a silver bowl of floating rose petals; another a monogrammed towel; and a third an atomizer filled with His Excellency's verberna eau-de-Cologne.

Then I was escorted by the unsmiling figures along the mile of corridors leading back to the dining salon. Kemal shot me a look of veiled amusement; but from the shocked expression of his generals and other guests, one knew that they had never dared flaunt, nor had seen flaunted, the rigid code of Palace behavior!

Over our coffee Kemal offered to show me the Harem quarters. Discretion made me hesitate, but curiosity to see the most fabulous rooms of Oriental history made me nod quickly—before he could change his mind. He shoved back his chair, courteously attended to mine, waved aside the servants and led the way. After traversing miles of long, narrow corridors we came at last to a pair of iron doors bolted with great locks. Kemal pushed them open.

Our steps were muffled by the fine soft matting, overlaid with Oriental rugs. The walls were of tile mosaic; the windows of stained glass, through which bright moonlight slanted. Deep cushioned divans; small inlaid coffee tables; old mirrors whose discolored glass once gave back the reflection of beautiful, indolent women. The silken prison seemed alive with their ghosts, whispering in the alcoves, moving on silent feet through dim corridors. We sat on one of the divans.

"So you are now in the harem of the Sultans," said Kemal, smiling slightly.

"And of Turkish dictators, Your Excellency?"

"You can see for yourself—it is unoccupied." His eyes were facetious, but he was telling the truth. Even the eunuchs were gone; there were no women—abolishment of the harem was among Kemal's reforms.

Beyond the one open window a lone gull winged by, skimming the black surface of the Bosphorus. I recalled to him the legend that these birds were the souls of unwanted women of the Sultan's Seraglio who had been sewn into sacks and dropped through a secret passage into the silent waters beneath.

"All that is past history."

"And contemporary history, Your Excellency?" I asked.

"What I do, I do openly," he declared. "The Turkish temperament is not secretive."

No one was more aware than Kemal himself that a certain phase of his character was discussed the world over. There in that quiet room he spoke of it. "*La grande passion*," he said, "is the most vital force in the universe. Without it I would cease to exist. But it is more important to be loved than to love."

And for a moment I thought of him not as a man who takes his women ruthlessly, but as a somewhat lonely human being.

I asked him what charmed him most in women and he replied:

"Not beauty. While it is necessary for people of accomplishment to be sensitive to beauty as an inspi-

ration, it is not that which attracts me most. But sympathy is a flame leaping between two hearts. And," he added with a smile, "I've never been really interested in a woman who was not blessed with God-given intelligence!"

A small cloisonné clock chimed the hour. Kemal arose. The interlude was ended. We retraced the long corridors and rejoined the dinner guests. Taking my departure, he bade me adieu, bowing lingeringly over my hand. With a brisk and general good night to his other guests, he turned to a secretary who hovered nearby, his arms filled with papers. Ignoring the hour, the indefatigable Kemal took up his duties as the busy dictator.

I was to find this ruler of the new Turkey moody, high-strung, driven by compelling impulses. Having refused for years to be interviewed, he now seemed reluctant to dismiss his interviewer. His invitations were in the nature of royal commands. I sat with him in his special gold and crimson loge in Parliament, where he listened attentively to the smallest details of government under discussion by its 300 deputies. At such times—grave, self-disciplined—he touched nothing to drink, not even wine. He was the astute and brilliant executive.

Then suddenly he would have to get away.

And so we would dance all night, at sun-up go aboard his yacht, and with his friends and sister steam down the Bosphorus to his summer home at Prinkipo, green island in an enchanted sea where white daisies lifted their faces to a sunny sky. Next day we were

burning up the roads in a powerful American-made car. Held in readiness for any impulse which might seize him were special boats, trains, airplanes.

By this time I had been officially informed that I was a guest of the Turkish government and my syndicate editors had wired congratulations on the stories I had filed on Kemal and his country from a vantage point never before granted any journalist.

But I could not deny the rumors that were rife in the American colony nor the interpretation put on our association by the romantic Turks. I knew by then that he was in love with me, but by many contrivances which taxed my ingenuity, I avoided any occasion when he might tell me so.

The coterie closest to Kemal had hinted that for me to remain would be most welcome in helping their Chief of State carry on his westernization program. But I wondered whether the Turkish people with their intense nationalism would resent their Atatürk making a foreign alliance.

However, I was accepting life's worldly and glamorous gifts. Kemal Atatürk was one of the world's most important figures—and a man of great charm. And above all, I was getting a scoop which was to make journalistic history.

As I traveled up and down Turkey I was to hear from all classes of Turks, young and old, of high rank and low: "Look in the heart of any Turk and you will find there one name—Atatürk." It was conceded that he had done more for them during the twelve years of his regime than would have been accomplished in the

same number of centuries under Ottoman rule. Surely here was plain evidence of a man who had wrought much good for his people and for this he was to be admired.

So that the American journalist might observe the tremendous changes in Turkish military tactics, Kemal put on a sham battle for me in the Uskar Hills.

On the preceding day 5,000 men had marched from Istanbul. The maneuvers were conducted with all the strategy and technical organization that go with modern warfare.

During the entire day Atatürk—Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Armies—relaxed only twice. And then for two brief but typically gallant gestures.

Pointing to a machine gun hidden deep in a sandy ravine and camouflaged by the thorny bushes of the region, he said with elaborate casualness, "Will you fire this, Bayan Gladys?"

He knew of course that its belt of cartridges held blanks, but not I. Nevertheless, scrambling down to it, I knelt beside the terrible thing and, with no apparent concern for my new navy-blue suit, red sandals, and cocky beret, finished the round of ammunition. "Bravo!" applauded my commander. "I think you have won the war for us!"

Turning, he summoned his generals and ordered the name of the place to be changed to that of "American Hill" and to appear so on the official map of Turkey.

Later he located a field telephone and had it connected so that I might speak from the "field of battle"

to the American Embassy of this act of international friendship. From the other end of the wire came the genial voice of the Ambassador. He commended me for the success of my mission as an "Ambassadress of Good Will."

Toward the last of my stay in Turkey I went with Kemal's sister to his capital, Ankara. It was this place of all Turkey that he loved best. His pink stucco residence crowned the summit of Chan Kaya. It was not a palace—formal, cold—but a pleasant dwelling set about with gardens and flowering acacia.

At dusk, seated in the green-tiled patio open to the sky, the murmur of fountains making a low accompaniment to his voice, Kemal said:

"You have heard perhaps that I have won many victories. Ah well—I will tell you something. Each night even after the greatest of them I felt a profound sadness—*une grande tristesse*. I thought of all the soldiers dead on the battlefields. If I had but one motto to leave to my people it would be this: 'Peace at home and peace in the world.'"

The next day I returned to Istanbul to attend a dinner given for me at the American Embassy. The Ambassador confided to me that the diplomatic pouch had that day carried special dispatches to President Roosevelt and the Secretary of State commending my work. The last of my stories about Dictator Kemal and his new Turkey were appearing simultaneously in newspapers all over the world. I am glad I was not blasé about it: I realized this was a legitimate triumph in which I could take honest pride in a job well done.

When I returned to my hotel it was after midnight.

Still clad in my evening finery I spent the rest of the night on the small balcony of my room, reviewing the past incredible weeks.

Of course I was flattered and honored by Kemal's admiration and no one could deny that he had brought enlightenment and much-needed reforms to his people. Also I felt the mysterious spell of the East. If I left now should I long to return?

Then I recalled Kemal's own words admitting his ruthlessness: "I ask myself who can prevent me from attaining my goal. And after finding that out I decide what measures to take and take them."

I also remembered that when this dictator separated Church from State he had recanted his belief in the Moslem (or any) God. And when a priest had come to plead with him he had thrown at the holy man a copy of the Koran—sacred scriptures of the East.

The sudden dawn swept over the sea of Marmora, bathing sky and land and water in soft, translucent blue. The golden minarets of old Constantinople, emerging from the mists, pointed towards Heaven, and the voice of a lone muezzin summoned the faithful to prayer.

And suddenly again, dear God!

I was isolated in a cold, blue void where neither light nor warmth could ever reach me.

Afterwards, I saw my way, straight and clear, as if a decision had been made for me by a Power beyond my power.

There was no light here. The dictator philosophy

was no part of what I was seeking. Had I so long forgotten my goal? Had I lost my way through this plunge into the world's illusion?

I must go on. Somewhere. Someone. . . .

I had to know.

6

Holding Hands with Mussolini

IN THE life of a foreign correspondent the only thing to be expected is the unexpected. Thus, as I was about to leave my hotel room in Istanbul to go after my other Balkan stories, the phone rang.

Long distance from Rome. Some of my Southern publishers were there as guests of the Italian government. I talked with Victor Hanson of *The Birmingham New-Age-Herald* and Clark Howell of *The Atlanta Constitution*.

They said they were infuriated and chagrined because they had not been granted an audience with Mussolini, and ended with the assignment:

“Hop a plane and see if you can get to him.”

So I took the first plane for Rome and while the Big Chiefs were, to their disgust, being escorted on a sightseeing tour of Fascist Italy I tried to make my first appointment with Il Duce.

Italy's threat to Ethiopia threatened the peace of the world. Diplomats of other governments were in Rome trying to engineer an amicable settlement. The

Italian capital teemed with reporters. But, as was his custom during crisis, the great man would have none of us.

I had daily access to Count Ciano. The youthful and dapper Ciano was married to Mussolini's daughter, Edda.

He had been elevated, via nepotism, to serve as his father-in-law's Minister of Foreign Affairs and so was in constant contact with Il Duce. Having spent some time in the United States, he liked Americans. He had respect for the other fellow's job and did all he could to arrange an appointment for me, but, after a week, admitted his efforts were futile.

Meanwhile, time and expense account were mounting. There were other European appointments.

Another Zero Hour.

Back in my hotel room I came across an American magazine which carried an intimate story about Mussolini. I read it. Suddenly my eye fell on a single sentence. It told of Il Duce's right gentlemanly preference for blondes. Among my unrepresented credentials was a syndicate broadside flaunting a very blonde photograph. Very well. All regular channels were closed to me and so with an apology to my newspaper code which hitherto had scorned the assistance of feminine weapons, I took the picture to Ciano. He got the idea. It appealed, I think, to the Latin sense of drama and also to his sense of humor. He grinned, stuffed the broadside in his pocket and dashed for the door.

An hour later to my hotel room came the huge

envelope addressed "The Gentile Signorina." The Head of the Government would receive me at 8:30 that evening.

Through the shadow of Rome's late twilight my taxi rounded the corner of the Via Nazionale and swung suddenly into the lighted square. Tentatively, cautiously, it approached the great brown structure on the right. With its low barred windows, and medieval battlements, the Palazzo Venezia presented a sinister look. It had defended four centuries of Venetian cardinals and ambassadors to the Vatican. Now, ironically, it sheltered a godless dictator.

The taxi came to a halt. Uniformed guards with rifles stiffened to alertness. A half dozen Black Shirts rushed forward. Before I was allowed to alight it was necessary to present the official communication, which in turn was compared with the schedule of Il Duce's appointments. I was escorted under the towering entrance through a vast hall and up three flights of interminable marble stairs.

Reaching the upper floor I followed my escort through a series of sumptuous rooms. Frescoed walls in old gold velvet. Famous oil paintings of the Italian Renaissance. Chairs of a great council chamber upholstered in faded brocade. Museum sculpture. Carpets thick and soft beneath the foot. Heavy draperies at high windows to shut out the noise of the popular forum.

At last the massive oak doors. My escort pressed a final bell. The doors swung open and he departed. I

began my progress of that overwhelming chamber which had become one of the celebrated halls of history.

The room was bare save for the desk and two chairs at one far corner. Beside the desk stood a stocky figure whom the distance rendered almost unrecognizable. I was conscious of a steady, penetrating gaze and regretted that I had not been warned as was a first sitter to Sargent to wash my soul prior to the ordeal. I recalled Senator Arthur Vandenberg telling me at a luncheon in the Senate dining room that he had waited once in Rome for three weeks for an appointment with Mussolini, but the "march" up that vast chamber had so unnerved him that when the Republican leader reached Il Duce's desk it was only to make a flimsy excuse and beat an undignified retreat.

As I came up to him, Mussolini began comparing the publicity photograph on his desk with the original. Seemingly satisfied that no hoax was involved, he kissed my hand once, twice, three times and then asked me to be seated.

The eyes of Mussolini I shall always remember. Round, lashless, the color of clear amber, there flamed within them such fanaticism as I have seen only in the eyes of religious zealots. A medical man might have recognized in their protruding formation a hyperthyroid condition which in turn might account in some measure for their owner's dynamic activity. A psychologist would have stamped Il Duce at first glance as a megalomaniac; imperious, determined to impose his will, eager to translate into reality the ideas

which one could almost see at work behind the high domed forehead.

I explained my mission. "Is it true, Your Excellency, that Africa is destined to be the battleground between East and West?"

"I am not a prophet," he replied, "but this I can say. Italy will never perpetrate war. Italy will never perpetrate war," he reiterated as was his habit for special emphasis, "but Italy will always be ready for self-defense. And her colonies must be defended." He said it arrogantly, head held high, and one felt the full implication of his words.

That he had no intention of turning back from his Ethiopian move was obvious from the deep-bellied and contemptuous grunt which echoed throughout the great chamber when I mentioned the diplomatic intervention of other governments toward an amicable settlement of Italy's grievances in East Africa.

His face darkened: "Nobody has a right to do that. We will never tolerate interference in matters which concern our precautionary measures."

It was suggested that the problem of rapport between Ethiopia and Italy involved the peace of the world.

In a single sentence Il Duce set forth his creed as an individual, as head of the Italian government and as leader of Fascism: "Why do you ask me about the world? I am for Italy."

"But, Your Excellency, are you not also for universal peace?"

"As a political man, I am not for war; as a philoso-

pher, as one who follows the course of history, I do not believe in peace. However, if there is any guarantee of peace it is in preparedness."

As he talked he stood and addressed the great empty room as if it were packed to the doors.

A storm had blown up. Hailstones pelted against the sinister barred windows.

At last Il Duce reseated himself, turned his head and stared out at the dripping night. I studied his profile. His resemblance to the great Italians preserved in the bronzes of Donatello was arresting.

After an hour, he rose abruptly. "The conversation is finished," he said. "You understand that not one word of it is to be published."

I thought at first he was joking. What he had said to me had not carried the pledge of confidence. Not once had he prefaced a remark with the familiar "off the record." It had been a straight news interview of questions and answers, to be quoted verbatim.

But he was not joking. He came over to where I stood, his face very close to mine. "I command you not to publish one word of anything I have told you."

"But, Your Excellency," I said, "you knew that I came as a journalist. The appointment was made for an interview."

He thrust out his belligerent jaw, shook his fist. "I defy you to print any of it—now or ever. Do you understand?"

I forgot I was facing a dictator and that neither my editors nor my embassy knew of my whereabouts. Forgetting the diplomatic form of address I said: "I

came here for one purpose only—to get an interview and I am not accustomed to killing my own stories.”

“And I,” he said, “am accustomed to only one thing—obedience.”

Suddenly the room was plunged in darkness.

Only the week end before I left the States I had been the guest of Inventor John Hays Hammond, Jr. at his fabulous castle-museum on the Massachusetts shore. My host had told me of taking to Italy what was then the most up-to-date secret radio device and offering it as a gift to Pope Pius XI. His Holiness refused it, saying that he placed his protection in a Higher Power. Mussolini, however, had welcomed the invention, and Jack himself had installed it under this very desk. I knew therefore that Mussolini by a touch of his hand could summon his secret police.

Would I be seized there in the dark and dragged off by his henchmen? I recalled the ill-fated Matteoti. Even if I had wanted to scream who, within those secluded walls, would have heard me?

So I stood perfectly still. Neither of us spoke.

The pulsating minutes seemed hours.

Then as suddenly as they had gone off the lights in the huge crystal chandelier flared up again. Mussolini was standing there adamant, unyielding. “Now will you print it?”

“Yes,” I flung at him. “You have a job to do, and you do it. You have no right to interfere with mine.”

He smiled, “I had heard that American women were lacking in courage.” And as if to make amends, he said, “Come sit down and join me in a cup of coffee.”

Motivated by an insatiable appetite for knowledge wherever he might find it, Il Duce asked innumerable questions, creating that flattering atmosphere of *en rapport* and, better still from the reporter's standpoint, allowed *me* to ask questions.

I asked him if women had no place in Fascism. His dark eyes flashed. "The normal vocation of the Italian woman is in her home and family. She is not by temperament politically minded. Her one desire is to marry and raise a family. What you American women do not realize is the early maturity of the Latin race. Many of the girls in rural sections marry by the time they are thirteen. Besides, here the mania of work for work's sake has no appeal."

"Are there no women in Italy, Your Excellency, who would prefer careers to marriage?"

For answer he related an incident which grew out of the levying of his sensational bachelor tax. The unmarried males forthwith had agitated for a similar tax on spinsters. The petition was brought to Mussolini's attention. "I looked it over," he said, "and my answer was: 'I cannot sign this, for there is no woman in Italy who would not be married if she had a chance. That is hardship enough without being taxed for it!'"

Fixing me with a reproving gaze, he demanded: "Why aren't you married?"

I dodged the personal angle by the simple feminine device of blushing.

Then cunningly he countered my question: "Are there no women in America who prefer homes and children to careers?"

I thought of the New York subways jammed every morning with thousands of young women, many of whom no doubt would gladly exchange business careers for homes of their own.

"Yes, I believe there are many. But there is no over-supply of husbands, Your Excellency. And women must live."

"What do you earn in a week?" he asked.

Since my earnings varied, I mentioned what I considered a modest average.

He sat forward in his chair, translating my stipend into Italian currency.

"Are you worth so much?"

And for the only time in the intense dark eyes I surprised an unexpected glint of humor.

Suddenly his glance fell on a small box I had brought with me and which his guards had eyed with suspicion.

"What's in that?" he demanded.

I showed him an equipment for making impressions of the hand which, for my own amusement, I sometimes took with me on interview assignments. He was immediately interested.

"Do you know about such things?" he asked and held out his hand eagerly.

I smeared the impression ink across the broad palm and along the strong wide fingers. When the imprint had been made he lifted his hand carefully from the sheet and affixed the imperial initial. Extending his hand palm up, he asked, "What do you see there?"

I traced the line of Fate sweeping without break from wrist to middle finger. "It is written here," I told him, "that the son of a Dovia blacksmith would one day direct the destiny of 42,000,000 people."

He seemed pleased. I pointed out the star at the base of the index finger. "That proves it," I said. "The mark of an ambition which counts no cost too great for its fulfillment. I think you would allow nothing to get in your way, Your Excellency."

"I have always welcomed difficulties," he said, "and it is well, for they have been more numerous than the pleasant incidents. But struggle has hardened my spirit, has taught me how to live. Tell me more."

I did not tell him that his exaggerated Mount of Venus would reveal him—even to the most amateur palmist—as a voluptuary, lest he plunge the room again in darkness. Instead I showed him the ragged breaks in his well-defined life line: "Your life has been many times in danger. More assassinations have been plotted against you than any other ruler."

"Ah, I am lucky," he said proudly.

"Yes, each break is guarded by a square of preservation. But look, Your Excellency—" his head bent closer, "here is one break which the gods have not protected. According to this your hour is almost at an end. Your fall will be swift and violent."

He withdrew his hand sharply. "I do not believe in such child's play," he said contemptuously. "There is only one preservation for man or nation—and that is power. I am strong; Italy is strong. We will go on so!"

During the latter part of that first interview with

Mussolini, and on two later occasions when he received me during world crises, I found him as a personality not wholly unattractive; in conversation he was responsive, and of keen intellectual enterprise. But as a man I saw in him the egoist, braggart, bully and liar.

Only the egoist and braggart would have responded as he had to the fun routine of the palm reading. Only a bully would have tried to terrorize a defenseless woman. And it was only his cheap susceptibility to women, aroused by a flattering photograph, that had made him grant an interview to an accredited journalist. And what a liar! He knew on that first interview that in a few days his Desperati Squadron would drop bombs on the sleeping Adowa.

And so I came away gravely disturbed that the fate of millions depended on the whims of such a man, and discouraged over humanity's centuries-old struggle to rid itself of tyrants.

7

For the Sound of a "Voice That Is Stilled . . ."

AT THE Excelsior Hotel I found my editors back from their sightseeing tour. They were hilarious over my getting a scoop on them with Mussolini during their absence—they were first of all good newspapermen—and staged a party in my honor.

In the midst of the celebration I was handed a cablegram. From that Southern town, 3,000 miles away, it announced the death of my mother.

I could not make the long journey home for the last rites on that warm, grassy hillside under the great live oak spreading garlands of Southern moss. But inventing some excuse I left the party and went out alone into the dark night. I do not know how I got there, but I found myself at last on a park bench. The storm had spent itself but raindrops dripped disconsolately through the trees. There was no one about.

As I sat there I thought about my mother. Ours was not the usual daughter-mother relationship. Never

from the time that I was born had she displayed any sentiment toward me. In my childhood all my natural overtures for affection were rebuffed; all my bids for confidences rejected. More than once I had overheard her say that I was an unwanted child and how she had tried all the old wives' devices to keep from having me.

Her justification: A celebrated Georgia beauty, she had married at nineteen and had given birth to four children in as rapid succession as is biologically possible, and was eager to resume a romantic relationship with my father without the incessant interruption of childbirth.

So I never went to her when I was troubled or perplexed or in any way burdened. I had grown to accept her attitude and even thought I understood it. I had no conscious sense of hostility, and in time there was established between us a fine and genuine friendship. We treated each other as distinct and liberated personalities—as impersonally as though we were not of the same family. There were friends even to whom I felt emotionally closer.

It was not until news came that my mother was no longer on this earth that I acknowledged to myself that I loved her more than any other human being and that the defense mechanism I had built up to shield me from unbearable pain was not a substitute for maternal love.

As I sat there on that park bench in Rome I knew I could not bear to hear those beautiful words of the Episcopal burial service. . . . *"Death is swallowed*

up in victory . . . O Death, where is thy sting?" For my mother held no brief for death in any of its manifestations. She cared only for life and the living.

"And this corruption shall put on incorruption . . ." No, I could not bear to hear those words, because I was unable to imagine any state of incorruption as beautiful as my mother was beautiful.

My first remembrance of her was in an evening gown of crimson velvet, standing for a moment in the door of my nursery before setting out with my father for the theater. I feel sure that somewhere along her father's mysterious past was a Celtic strain. Black—very black—hair, and eyes as breath-takingly blue as a rain-swept sky in April. A complexion as faintly tinted as apple blossoms, a mouth sweetly curved and often filled with laughter.

Without aggression or domination she was the central sun of our family. Social life seemed to her stupid and artificial, yet with an unstudied art she drew people—all sorts of people.

I never knew her to seek friends, or even to observe the ordinary gestures of friendship; and yet our home, because of her, was always filled with guests. Her naturalness, lack of attitudinizing and dissembling, made the shyest individual feel relaxed and complete in her presence. She was as warm and glowing as amber.

"And as we have borne the image of the earthy . . ." the minister would be saying and these words would not have offended her. For she responded to nature

in an earthy, pagan way which made her care more for the out-of-doors than for people.

She was never really happy with a roof over her head.

In a religious sense she was also a pagan. As far as I know she had never been inside a church. Not from prejudice but simply because religion held no interest for her.

Once, in the first days of bereavement following my father's death, I stood with her beside his grave. Her inarticulate despair was such that I sought to convince her of some future recognition of the vibrant love which had glowed throughout the duration of their marriage. But she would have none of it. Her intellectual integrity was such that even in her great tragedy she would not compromise with beliefs in which she could not trust.

At other times I attempted to share with her possible proofs of the continuity of life and personality. But while she never discouraged my own groping for faith, she herself simply could not be converted.

I do not know how long I sat there in that deserted Roman park thinking about my mother, but suddenly:

I was isolated in a cold, blue void where neither light nor warmth could ever reach me.

Though I had never felt that I was flesh of her flesh while she was living, now I felt in the most intensely biological way the severing of a bond as elemental as rain and earth; as primitive as hunger and mating. It was as though the cord which had bound us had not been severed at birth, but in that hour.

As suddenly as it came, this passed and in its place a wall of human anguish erected itself about me. And I realized a sense of grief which I knew must be taken into my being; must be accepted though I had no philosophy or religion for its acceptance.

To be sure, my church asserted in its creed the "resurrection of the body and the life everlasting," but the belief to me had never been quite valid or death would not be to Christians the terrible thing it is.

Then never again on earth would I hear my mother's voice. . . .

But was this literally true? Others claimed communication with the departed. Only a few years before I had gone to a lecture given by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I expected to hear him talk about his literary creation, the fabulous Sherlock Holmes. But I discovered that in his latter years Sir Arthur had shifted his scientific inductive reasoning from the investigations of that clever fellow of Baker Street to investigations of the world beyond. After proving to his own conviction that the dead are as near as the living and that communication with them is possible, he had consecrated his time and gifts as one of England's foremost writers to present his proofs to the world.

Among his most believing converts was his wife. Rumor had it that after Sir Arthur's death disciples of the noted spiritualist flocked from far places to Windlesham in Sussex to hear from Lady Conan Doyle messages that purported to come from her husband, and to make a pilgrimage to his garden shrine.

An idea stirred in my mind. But no. That would mean Spiritualism and the very word irritated me. It stood in my mind for trivialities and vulgarities; for mediumistic utterances often offensive to good taste and frequently accompanied by claptrap.

And yet . . . *where was my mother?*

From the park bench I watched a new day light the treetops. With it came hope and decision. I would go and talk with Lady Conan Doyle about these communications from her husband. . . .

Lady Conan Doyle led the way to a sunny window corner of the huge, flower-filled room at Windlesham. The view held the tranquility and timelessness of a Constable landscape: unclouded blue skies, and sheep—like puffs of cotton—dotting the gentle green of Sussex Downs.

From over the mantel a portrait of Sir Arthur smiled genially down on us. His great dane Tamerlane came over, inspected the stranger in his master's deep armchair and stretched his imposing length on the hearth rug.

Lady Conan Doyle was a delicate, patrician beauty; sensitive forehead, eyes warmly gray and responsive. Immediately she put aside any embarrassment I might have felt in approaching the subject of her husband's "spirit messages."

"I should like you to know," she said, "that I am happy to talk with you about these things. Any personal feeling must be put aside if, by sharing the proofs we have had of my husband's survival, we can

help others to the comforting knowledge that the dead have never died.

"We have that knowledge. We feel his presence. We speak with him. We are in constant touch. His voice rings out clearly, calling my name. I feel his hand placed caressingly on my hair. He has grown younger during the last year, as is shown by messages and psychic photographs made under test conditions. Yes, we have incontestible proof that my husband has never died."

According to his widow, Sir Arthur was able to look with prophetic vision at world affairs. He had predicted tremendous imminent changes—terrific upheavals of the earth's surface. This devastation, he claimed, would be necessary to bring harmony out of the present stage of materialism.

Her calm, well-modulated voice made the occult seem as pleasantly normal as the glazed chintz and bowls of primroses.

"I am impressed," continued Lady Conan Doyle, "with my husband's descriptions of the naturalness of the other world. The scenery is much the same as the earth-plane—great mountains and valleys, lakes with water of translucent blue and waterfalls of exquisite colors and sounds, all intensified. The beauty of nature in our everyday world is only a dim reflection of the Real World which lies beyond our mortal sight."

I asked if she communicated with her husband directly or through a medium.

"Because I am psychic I am able to talk with him whenever he has a message he wants to get through to

us. But since our work now is to convince others, many of his communications are sent through people who never met my husband and are unknown to us. The charge can not then be brought that it is our unconscious mind which speaks."

Could she tell me some of the examples which she considered the most authentic of these mediumistically conveyed messages?

Without hesitation she replied: "They are innumerable. Two days after my husband passed on he sent a message to me through a medium in Canada. He said I was on my knees in his study looking for some legal papers in a small drawer close to the floor at 11:30 A.M. on a certain date. That was true to the smallest detail and no one knew about it except my son Denis. My husband has sent messages to me through other mediums, thanking me for the flowers I had that day placed on his sanctum—as we call his grave in the garden—and in his study. He named the colors in each case. At other times, through mediums, he has sent word about business affairs known only to the immediate family. We depend on him for his counsel and suggestions just as we did when he was with us in the flesh."

I suggested that the skeptics would object to the triviality of some of the messages.

"Yes, I know. But what they don't understand is that the deep and learned matters—which they insist upon—would not be half so reassuring or convincing as having my husband, with his interest in his family and all matters concerning his home, come through

with his knowledge of these so-called trivialities. Besides these are the simple proofs we all need for purposes of identification."

I asked her if she believed the time would come when we would be able to communicate with the departed without the aid of an intermediary.

She nodded. "I do. Before my husband passed over, his guide on the other side told him that they of the spirit world were creating, through a scientific man on the earth plane, an instrument by which communication could be accomplished without the psychic powers of a medium. Recently I have been brought in contact with a brilliant inventor who has made remarkable progress with just such an instrument. When it is completed, it will photograph objects and faces in a room which are not visible to the human eye. The inventor admits that his inspiration came through assistance from the spirit world."

I put forth another objection often voiced by critics against the authenticity of spirit communications—telepathy.

Her argument was that if telepathy were so common a human faculty there would be no private knowledge of any kind. "Businessmen," she explained, "would be able to read the secrets of others. Students would be able to tune in on the brains of their professors and there would be no need to study. We should always be reading the minds of strangers, visualizing incidents in their past lives—and how very unusual one such probable example in the life of any individual would be."

Knowing Sir Arthur's reputation as a man of science, I wanted to know if he had an explanation of how the soul functions without an organism.

"As described by him the process of death is quite uncomplicated," she said. "The silver cord, of which poets in their divine genius have spoken, is severed, releasing the etheric body from the fleshly form. The etheric body is exactly the same as that which we use on earth except it is free from all physical limitations."

I asked if her husband described the transition from this world to the next.

"Oh, yes," she said. "We fall into a deep sleep. When we awaken we find ourselves exactly the same. The realm to which we go immediately after 'death' is determined by the development of the character we have achieved here on earth. This evolution goes on. An individual's destiny is entirely dependent upon his own efforts. He may progress to great spiritual power and happiness or retrogress into lower conditions. The latter my husband calls the 'gray spheres.'"

I urged her to tell me more about what sounded like a sort of Spiritualists' Purgatory.

"Naturally the lower spheres are less pleasant than the higher; but the individuals who go there are unfitted as yet for an environment of beauty and harmony. The faults which take them there are selfishness, cruelty, bigotry and other undesirable characteristics."

"What about suicides?"

"Deliberate suicides, not those who are mentally unbalanced, find themselves in most unhappy condi-

tions and must wait a considerable time before they can work their way out of the position they have brought on themselves.

"However," she concluded, "I must emphasize that my husband has assured us repeatedly that no soul is ever lost or condemned to eternal punishment. Our Creator is a God of mercy and love and so there is always and forever another chance."

On this triumphant note tea was announced. At the table were Denis and Adrian Conan Doyle: college-bred, athletic, with their father's magnificent stature and their mother's compelling gray eyes. They were daring young men holding records for professional motor-car racing. They turned from a discussion of their favorite sport to relate recent communications with their father, changing easily to this extraordinary subject as if it were not extraordinary at all.

Jean Conan Doyle, the daughter, came in later to join us. Like her mother and her brothers, she too discussed communication with her father in the most matter-of-fact way. With complete sincerity she told of how she depended on her father's counsel for her chief occupation and hobby, the British Girl Guides.

And so I came away from hearing London's most articulate spokesman in the cause of Spiritualism. While I never doubted one iota of the evidence presented by Lady Conan Doyle from her own particular point of view, I knew that in order for survival to ring a bell in my own critical consciousness I should require first-hand experience.

So I sought out England's most noted mediums, by whom I had to be carefully screened and recommended before obtaining appointments.

Afterwards I weighed the evidence. I could not honestly say that I had been in touch with any spirit from the Beyond and certainly not with any whose identity was recognizable. However, I reversed my former overall skepticism, for I now possessed tolerance (not unmixed, perhaps with envy) for the earnest and comforting belief of those who practiced Spiritualism. Also it would be overcautious to deny that one felt an unseen energy in operation.

My ultimate conclusion was that of William James, who after years of research declared: "In psychic phenomena there is a residuum which we cannot explain."

My grief over my mother's death was not assuaged. This would remain until I came, *Deo volente*, upon a great sheltering tree of philosophy on which immortality would be one—but only one—of its many living branches.

Meanwhile, right there in England's last untarnished summer were some of the world's outstanding men of letters. Writers of the word, might they not be able to speak *The Word*?

And so I began negotiations for interviews with that triumvirate of genius—George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, G. K. Chesterton.

8

Seeking the Word

KING CHARLES: Oh, your voices, your voices. Why don't your voices come to me, I am king, not you.

JOAN: They do come to you but you do not hear them. When the Angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it, but if you prayed from your heart and listened to the thrilling of the bells in the air after they stopped ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do.

—Trial Scene from Shaw's *Saint Joan*.

These lines had always seemed to me a refutation of the charge that George Bernard Shaw was an atheist or an agnostic. Opening on other-world vistas, they might have been from the writings of a mystic.

At that time I agreed with Gandhi, who said he had never read anything of Shaw's that did not have "at the heart of it a religious center."

And so it was with high expectancy that I passed the two bronze lions which guarded the spiked iron grill of Whitehall Court and the pair of sphinxes set, like watchdogs, at the door of the world's most provocative playwright.

At the exact minute of our appointment the octogenarian, with movements as brisk as a jumping jack, entered the room and seated himself on the small, stiff sofa. The lights had been switched on against the rainy, gray morning and threw into sharp relief the celebrated features. Bristling white eyebrows projected ledgelike over eyes too small and set too close for the reporter's physiognomic scrutiny which tells much of inner character as revealed outwardly. The domelike forehead seemed to testify to that astounding statement of its possessor that brain power had, in adult years, given it a quarter-of-an-inch expansion. The articulate beard, which the Shavian vanity had grown to conceal the scars of smallpox, was still articulate.

After topical subjects had been disposed of with the usual vituperation, he asked me suddenly:

"Do you still have persecution in America?—Oh, don't look so shocked; you do, you know—persecution of the Catholics, persecution by the Ku Klux Klan—as bad as Hitler's persecution of the Jews. Any man or nation who hasn't nerve enough to say 'this has got to stop' will not prevail long as a leader."

With a half dozen of my colleagues I had been present at the only press interview Mr. Shaw had granted on his first and last visit to the United States. At that time he had laid about him in denouncing everything Americana. Lest he launch on a similar tirade, and anxious to get on with the real purpose of my visit, I said:

"Mr. Shaw, I am about to ask you a personal question. Do you believe in the existence of God?"

At my interjection of metaphysics the resonant voice rose to a querulous pitch—the sentences came sharp and quick like the staccato rain against the windows.

"I have no relations with Him, but the American people have. That is because Americans are boobs, provincials and barbarians. Why don't you ask them?"

"Tell me, Mr. Shaw, do you really enjoy insulting people?"

"Only Americans—because it's so easy to get a rise out of them and the more I insult Americans the fonder they become of me!"

Refusing the bait, I cast my own line: "And what is your opinion of Jesus Christ?"

"I have written what I think, and I repeat: if Jesus Christ had been indicted in a modern court he would have been examined by two doctors, found to be obsessed by a delusion and sent to an asylum."

He spoke gleefully now as if he were having an enormously good time. But I was tired of all the double-talk about whether or not Mr. Shaw was a man of faith—any faith. So I put my final, definitive query:

"What do you think will happen to you when you die, Mr. Shaw?"

"I sincerely hope and believe that will be the end of me. All I can say is that I believe in a life force which uses men to carry out a plan. But immortality is a

nightmare. If you could actually convince people of it there would be universal despair."

As I walked back to my hotel along the misty Thames Embankment I thought again of the lines the world's greatest playwright had put on the lips of Saint Joan. And I listened . . . but I could no longer hear the "thrilling of the bells in the air. . . ."

From a recluse dedicating his earlier years to mathematics, Bertrand Russell had seemed—in his *Conquest of Happiness*—to emerge as a social being with tenderness and concern for frustrated humanity. Indeed Will Durant, biographer of philosophers, had singled him out as the "most virile philosopher of our times."

Surely, a man who had breathed the atmosphere of The Absolute with Plato and Plotinus might open a peephole to my myopic squinting for the Vision Splendid.

Moreover, as a firebrand, Professor Russell had a flair for making headline news.

As a vocal foe of war he had, during World War I, been ousted from his chair at Cambridge and arraigned on the charge of pacifism. Believing private property to be the cause of war, he had espoused Communism until life among the Soviets sent him away, recanting and disillusioned.

Once again he had shifted his allegiance—this time to progressive education which he now declared to be the hope of the world. To be sure, the high-voltage

theories expounded at his Beacon Hall school for boys and girls, had transmitted considerable sparks across the Atlantic. But I, being naïvely optimistic, hoped to catch the gleam of the philosophers' stone under the rubbish heap of controversy.

Professor Russell, attracting few intimates, was living in England's lovely County Cornwall. Though our meeting came off at what seemed to be an unearthly morning hour, Professor Russell asserted that he was feeling as "merry as a chipmunk." He had, as was his custom, risen *early* and gone through the world's press over a leisurely breakfast. "At sixty-five," he said, "I enjoy life more with every year that passes."

He was no Beau Brummell, this twentieth-century Pythagoras. Slight of build, small of stature, he was wearing an ancient uncustom-built suit of navy serge. Slack socks wrinkled over black evening pumps with rusty, crumpled bows. Across his vest, a heavy gold watch chain such as girths small-town politicians. His hair was gray and unruly; his complexion florid; his dark eyes deeply circled.

By diverting his buoyant mood I risked his famous pronouncement that "serious persons are humbugs" and asked a very serious question. Did the former pacifist have any present formula for the prevention of war?

"The cause of war," he said, "is that human beings fundamentally hate one another. This could be overcome if our youth were trained to better humor. Education should be directed towards the needs and

understanding of the individual—primarily towards personal happiness.”

I asked him if he believed this to be an easy goal.

“It can come only through liberation. It is not in the nature of man to be happy in a prison, and the passions which shut us up in ourselves constitute one of the worst kinds of prisons.”

Could he be more explicit? He could and was!

“First of all I shall not teach my children that faithfulness to one partner in life is in any way desirable, or that permanent marriage should exclude temporary episodes. There are many persons whose natures require greater freedom and this latitude naturally should extend to both sexes.”

When I asked if he called this “experimental therapy” or “trial marriage,” the renowned educator delivered his opinion with contempt for fastidiousness:

“I dispense with conventionality, including labels. If public opinion allowed young people a relationship, say at twenty-one, without imposing the financial and emotional burdens of marriage, many of them would avoid being driven into pleasures which wear out the nervous system.”

“And for those who prefer old-fashioned marriage, Professor Russell?”

From the heavy-ringed eyes a patronizing smirk, making me feel as dated as his evening pumps.

“I suppose there are persons,” he admitted, “who realize the advantages to be had from a normal marital relationship. For those, then, it should not be postponed too long, and scientific contraceptive advice

should be removed from the bootleg class, and divorce made obtainable by mutual consent."

There were additional iconoclastic Russellisms: "Women, because of sentimentality, should be barred from the classroom. . . . All queries put by children should be answered fully and realistically, especially those concerning sex."

"And you expect these ideas to bring about the conquest of happiness, Professor Russell?"

"All these things will do away with a good deal of the confusion and unhappiness among young men and women whose emotional lives are at sixes and sevens."

I put my final query: "In your modern curriculum for the young would you eliminate religious training?"

"To have a hobby," he said, "is of far more importance in the pursuit of the good life than to have a religion. Modern folk should be trained to think of cleanliness instead of purity, health and happiness instead of chastity."

In the temple erected by The Sage of Cornwall there was neither ritual nor creed. It seemed to me I had witnessed a curious anomaly—a philosopher without philosophy.

I had gone to Professor Russell in the hope of hearing him speak The Word. He had spoken a word, but it was not the one I was after.

Coming away, I recalled a line from one of G. K. Chesterton's essays which seemed to fit my disappointment and emptiness: "It is easy enough to flatten out everything for miles around with dynamite if our only object is to give it death."

G. K. Chesterton settled back in the large but still incommodious armchair which seemed threatened by his gigantic height and weight and poundage. It was teatime and the Master of Paradox was in his most relaxed and cordial mood.

He was defending marital fidelity:

"One must pay for the miracle of love by faithfulness to one's mate. There is something within us which requires that our oaths be taken seriously. If we are unfaithful there is no poetry in loving, there is no fun in vowing."

As in his writing, his talk flowed smoothly in gleaming sentences compounded of mirth and metaphor and irrefutable logic.

"The chaos of modern life," he said, "is largely due to making divorce not only respectable but also a social asset. If it keeps up, a young man seeking a job might well boast, 'I've been divorced by six wives.' If we have no more self-control, no more patience, than that two people cannot endure each other except for brief, unruffled periods, then we should go about getting cured of our neuroses."

He ransacked his pockets to find a match for his cigar, which constantly needed relighting. Before he could begin to disengage himself from the snug-fitting chair I would offer a box of matches which, in turn, disappeared and which, like all the others, one felt reposed in quantities all over the bulging figure. Each time he struck the match he would make a wide mysterious sign on the air. Years later I discovered the

meaning of this cryptogram. It was the sign of the cross.

He decried the idea I had recently heard expounded that happiness could be attained by self-indulgence: "The less a man thinks of himself the more he thinks of his undeserved good luck and all the gifts of God."

He thought the most contented people were to be found in the small-town community, because of their simplicity and generous sympathies to their neighbors, enjoying the daily life which most people called the dull life.

To him Carol Kennicott, of *Main Street*, planting nasturtiums in the station yard, entering into communal life, fulfilling her duties, was more likely to find happiness than the Carol who yearned for "the sea and the ivory towers."

War he considered also in terms of morality:

"Two revolutions are racing each other—good and evil. The issue is clearly drawn and we must choose between black and white. One is the ideal that all good men dream of, the other the destruction of the things men most desire—such as marriage, ownership and religion."

Gilbert Keith Chesterton, England's most versatile literary figure, was Catholicism's most noted convert since Newman. It was a Faith which he had found after years of unhappy agnosticism. Because of it his total personality was filled with largeness and freedom, true gaiety of true spirituality, an immense

lovableness which we are told is begot of love.

It was his infinite gratitude for finding a religion whose parts "fitted with eerie exactitude" which formed the cornerstone of Chestertonian philosophy; gratitude to the Creator expressed in lack of pompousness and a fitting restraint.

"One must pay for existence by taking an active interest in life; for the beauty of the world by decent living; and even for such blessings as beer and Burgundy by drinking in moderation."

He mopped his broad forehead with a handkerchief—or was it a junior-size circus tent?—and talked on and on, the sentences looped together by pleasant little chuckles.

"I know people have the idea that I go about with both hands outstretched, one reaching for a Seidel of beer, the other for a glass of Burgundy. However that may be (and the chuckle here was a dead giveaway), it seems to me that temperate drinking is a virtue contributing to the spirit of festivity. It is easy to be heavy; hard to be light. One takes oneself gravely because it is the easiest thing to do."

Because of my inherited prejudice against Catholicism I had not introduced the subject of his conversion, which he had called his "great love affair." Nor, to my surprise, had he once mentioned it.

It was only in leaving, as he was inscribing a copy of his *Orthodoxy*, that I seemed compelled to inquire if by going over to Rome he was ever confronted by doubts.

Again the chuckle removing the usual embarrass-

ment of such a query: "Not afterwards. I've never once doubted that it was the wisest act of my life. Nor had I any doubts just before—only fears of something that had the finality of suicide! After the morning of my First Communion, which was the happiest of my life, I was confident that only from the Catholic standpoint did life take on order and meaning."

"Has it given you happiness?"

Handing me the book he said thoughtfully: "This religious philosophy, which was and will be again the study of the highest intellects, fills its possessor with a delirious exuberance!"

After I had left him I thought gratefully of G. K. C.'s philosophy of affirmation, but not once did I consider the Church which had given it to him.

One does not know, however, at the moment, what seeds are being planted in the spirit. It is only when they blossom, bear fruit, that we realize how long they have been a part of us.

Part 2

1

Southerner into Damyankee

THE year 1941 was born of a world in travail. I was back in America. When it was certain that Europe would kindle into flame, my Southern editors, to whom I still owed my first allegiance, had ordered me home. As oil to my indignation they had argued that I should be of more use to them *alive* in America; but I suspected it was a typically quixotic gesture of the Old South.

The last several years had been spent shuttling back and forth across the Atlantic—with three summers in Hitler's Germany. Like most individuals in those unsettled days, I took inventory. Objectively, at least, the books balanced.

During the past twenty years I had interviewed practically every figure of our times as he attained celebrity. My professional life had leveled off to a plateau of useful activity and was steadily expanding. I had been asked to write a book; to take on a radio program; to go on a lecture tour.

My personal life, which to a writer is always

crowded into secondary position, seemed good enough. As a *piéd à terre*, I kept my New York apartment to come home to. A little Bahaman maid lived there and served me with the same devotion as had my old Mammy Addie. There were enough romances to keep me from falling into that dreary group of career women who, in big cities, seem to go about in droves, unescorted and unadmired, and without the fillip of male companionship. But for the present my emotions were not seriously involved.

Of very real value to me were solid friendships of both sexes built up over the years and which I had grappled to me "with hoops of steel."

I had not realized my spiritual goal, but like Chesterton, I too believed

That at the next white corner of a road
My eyes may look on Him.

In the States I commuted via plane between New York and Washington. In that teeming prewar Capital, I kept a room at the Mayflower. Its lounge—like the Adlon bar in Berlin—was the listening post for my colleagues, especially those reporting international affairs. Here at 5 P.M. we foregathered. Here also were to be found outstanding figures of the diplomatic set, of Congress and of the business and financial world. We met, drank tea or cocktails, danced and gossiped with everyone.

On one such occasion I returned to my table and was introduced to a man I thought someone said was from Vermont. When all the others had, for one rea-

son or another, drifted away, he and I still sat there. I don't know why, because a story was in my typewriter, to make the always and forever impending deadline.

Being an interviewer, it was second nature for me to employ the same technique in social conversation. So I began quizzing him about himself and settled back to listen. It does no harm with the average male. Indeed, I suspect it is an art without which neither Helen nor Cleopatra could have budged by an inch the course of history!

But my newly met companion turned the tables and seemed genuinely interested to know something about *me*. So I switched to my second-best interviewing device—the old home place. Would he tell me something about Vermont? I said that all I knew about it were those Green Mountain Boys of history-book days and Mr. Coolidge's monosyllabic anecdotes. I confessed that I was not even sure of the location of Vermont on the map.

Later when I learned that the natives of no other state in the Union can match the loyalty of Vermonters, I wondered why this inauspicious opening hadn't ruined me forever with that particularly dedicated one.

It didn't. And I was glad. Because at that first meeting, I fell desperately, wholeheartedly, helplessly in love. The object of my delight was completely unaware of it. I sat gazing at him.

He was dressed in quiet good taste. Stockily built, about him there was the aura of health and vitality.

His face sun-tanned. In his dark blue eyes there was that rare commingling of keen intelligence and a compassion for all living. His appearance made an impressive comparison with the somewhat effete and dissipated males who were beginning to people my particular *mise en scène*.

As we talked, I discovered that his interests were turned outward—a relief from the introverted egotists with whom my work more often than not brought me into contact.

I was attracted also by his wry humor which furnished more amusing comments in a short time than most of my associates (striving for the same effect in order to be quoted by the columnists) developed in donkeys' years.

It was getting late, almost time for his plane to leave, and he asked if I would care to remain and dine with him.

Would I? I wanted nothing better than to dine with him that evening and every evening for the rest of my life!

Whatever biographical data I managed to corkscrew out of this reticent Vermonter was of bony outline. His name? Roy L. Patrick. What did the "L" stand for? Leonard, but it was too fancy; Roy was good enough; even though "off" horses were called Roy in Vermont. Married? He had been a widower for six years. It had almost finished him when he lost his wife—most people considered her a "saint." Family? Two sons (both married now)—and two well-bred bird dogs.

Because their job demands it, journalists and especially interviewers must possess three faculties. The ability of swiftly summing-up a personality; an imagination which colors and enhances, but without distortion, the actual words which are spoken; and above all a sixth sense which penetrates the subjective sides of character and, like the sensitive lens of a camera, catches the subtle lights and shadows.

And so without his knowing it, I discovered very much more about the Vermonter than he had intended. This was revealed in his succinct comments about those ordinary topics which any two persons, newly met of that spring evening in Washington, might be discussing over the dinner table.

His business in Washington? It didn't concern his own business—spadework for a fund-raising campaign to build a medical center in Vermont. . . . Funny thing—and it sounded bromidic to say it—but he had discovered that, as you get older, the greatest satisfaction to be had out of *this* life was doing for others.

War and would we get in it? He thought morally we should have declared war when Hitler started his persecution of minorities. One thing he detested was intolerance . . . he'd as soon tell a fellow how to spend his money as to dictate what religion he should follow.

And the outcome of war? We and the Allies would win, of course. (My three summers in Germany had shown me the Nazi military machine, which seemed almost invincible.) Had he prophesied victory out of

that chauvinism which made Americans feel we could win any war against whatever odds?

Why was he so sure? Because Hitler was wrong and we were right. And though he wasn't a religious man in the churchgoing sense, he believed there was a God.

Dinner over, he thanked me for having shared the meal and said that it was nice having met me. Nothing at all about the possibility of a future meeting. I felt he was about to vanish-out of my sight and life, so, impulsively I gave him my card with its phone and address. I said I hoped sometime when he was in New York, he would tell me more about himself and Vermont; that my first "interview" with a Vermonter had been my toughest assignment up to date.

He laughed and told me a Vermont story.

"Sam Jones had been ill all winter. One sunny afternoon in spring his lifelong neighbor, passing, saw him on the porch and thought he should say something: 'Hi! Sam, glad to see you out, how're you feelin'?'—'None of your darn business,' said Sam, 'and if you hadn't been my next door neighbor, I wouldn't have told you that much.'"

Then he was gone.

As I lingered over my after-dinner coffee I thought about this man from Vermont. That he had charm and wit was not unusual—but how very unusual to meet someone in days of sophistication, materialism and go-getter practices who, quite simply and unself-consciously, spoke of doing for others, of tolerance, of devotion to one's own wife, and of faith in God.

Followed a most unsatisfactory courtship. (If you could call it that.) Occasionally, I had a laconic, almost businesslike note saying nothing at all about me or wishing to see me.

Then one day, the World Series brought him to New York. He didn't suppose I would care to go with him. I doubt if there were anyone living (circa 1941) who knew or cared less than I about baseball. Also I avoided crowds.

But I went with him to every one of the World Series games at the horribly packed Yankee Stadium and while neither my fondness for nor knowledge of the sport was increased, I was blissfully happy. (And not a touch of claustrophobia!)

Every evening, my Vermonter invited me to dine with him. He talked (when he talked at all) mostly about hunting and fishing. Me, I'm Southern, and Southern women are not trained to tramp the woods all day or to haul in those dreadful deep-sea monsters. However, our training does not exclude that gentler art of angling, which is directed towards landing a good catch!

I listened, enthralled, to every detail of a recent salmon-fishing expedition until I was quite sure that no one could match me as an authority on the use of the dry or wet fly.

Six months passed. The visits, always on some plausible pretext, continued, but during all this time there was not one word of affection spoken; not one compliment given.

One of the lessons of a Southern female's upbringing-

ing is to resist making any overtures whatsoever to the male. And to be shamelessly honest, I had never up to this time found it necessary. So I waited. And I waited.

But I was beginning to get discouraged.

Came Thanksgiving. Came the Vermonter. This time I resorted to the feminine wile of a ravishing new hat. John-Frederic created one for me—it was meltingly beautiful with artist's colors and I thought, That'll fetch him!

While we were at the theater one evening the hat fell off my lap and onto the floor. He picked it up and in his disarmingly direct manner said: "How much did this cost?"

"Sixty-five dollars."

"Never heard of such a thing in all my life. No hat could be worth sixty-five dollars. I used to have to live on that for a whole month. You probably don't have any more respect for a dollar bill than an unborn child."

(Later this was one of the stories I told to the delight of his sons, who agreed with me that I couldn't possibly have done anything less favorable to further my case with a "thrifty" Vermonter.)

After the hat episode it seemed more time than ever elapsed without my hearing from him.

Pearl Harbor!

Like the rest of the world, I was deeply depressed and troubled. "Well, old girl," I said to myself, "get ready to do your stint as war correspondent." But for the first time in my life I didn't feel like the firehorse

who at the scent of smoke pricks up his ears and slips into harness. Suddenly, I was very tired. Tired of hanging up my clothes in strange closets. Tired of adjusting to new people. Tired of catching boats and trains and airplanes. Was it because of the years I had worked without a holiday or could it be that I was loath to put the ocean between me and . . . ?

The phone rang. He was coming to see me. Would he say *something*? Certainly I would not mention that I was arranging to have my passport put in order to go to war. . . . My feminine code permitted me to resort to a new hat . . . but my ethics as a woman drew the line at appealing to masculine chivalry.

We went to a matinee, and on our way stopped at a drugstore on Broadway. Perched at the counter, we were downing our cokes in order to make the first curtain, when apropos of nothing my escort said:

"But then, I suppose you'd literally freeze to death living in Vermont."

I held my breath. I was afraid to speak lest he change the subject. Then I caught that merry glint in the deep blue eyes.

"Guess I'd better get you a fur coat instead of an engagement ring—more practical!"

Though, romantic that I am, I hated the idea, I said, "By all means," as if it were the most natural procedure in the world. Then this reluctant Vermonter allowed as how there was plenty of time. He couldn't get down again anyway until February 7th.

Indeed, I thought, plenty of time! By then, I'd probably be blown to smithereens. Only the day be-

fore, New York was alerted for an air raid—even the schools had been dismissed.

He said he had a very busy month ahead, lots of board meetings.

"You wouldn't let a little thing like board meetings stand in the way, would you?" I said facetiously.

"I'm hired to serve on them—" (and I thought Mr. Coolidge had been resurrected).

Funnily enough I liked it. Here was a man who took responsibility as I took mine. Besides, I had been proposed to by a Vermonter. Or had I been?

Later we returned to my apartment for tea. He never did *ask* me if I would marry him. But he did say that if I *did* he thought I'd be making a mistake. That I didn't know anything about him. Wouldn't I like to meet his family? (There were his sons, their wives and numerous relatives.) Better see what I was "getting into." Also I should know something about his income, what I could expect from a practical angle.

"If you have a cellar and a sack of potatoes that's good enough for me."

"I have," he said, "but I also have interests in granite and talc mines, two of Vermont's products of which we are proudest."

"Mines!" I exclaimed. "I thought talc was the product of a beauty shop, and as for granite—well, I was beginning to think that was what Vermonter's hearts were made of."

After what happened then, I didn't think so any more. Later, when he admitted that he had felt as I had from the beginning, I asked him why on earth he

had taken so long to *tell* me. He replied by telling me another Vermont story:

“A couple up there, having just celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary, were sitting alone. The husband said, ‘I think so much of you, Hetty, that sometimes all these years it was all I could do to keep from tellin’ you!’”

There was a coat. A lovely mink—*and* an engagement ring!

2

Vermont—The Enchanted Land

ON A clear bright morning in February, 1942, I arrived in Vermont—that enchanted land—and had my first glimpse of what was to be my future home. After years of hotel and apartment living in the world's great cities, how pleasant it was to stand before that quietly classical Colonial house lifting its white chimneys to a cerulean sky. To enter and feel the aesthetic harmony of gracefully proportioned rooms where fragrant birch fires mingled their soft light with the patina of thin jewel-toned rugs, old mahogany and silver. And from every window vistas of snow-mantled mountain and lake.

With spring came fresh discoveries in a garden of every woman's dreams. Established perennial beds heavy with perfume, rich in color and bloom. Wide velvety lawns on which one trod gratefully in contrast to city asphalt. In the depth of this celestial spot a garden house had been built, assuring that blessed privacy which is as essential to a writer as life and breath. An old English setter to stretch quietly near one's knees. A book under contract.

I came to know and value its people. Their innate kindness, nobility and selflessness when trouble strikes at a neighbor. Their ability to stand alone, without props to ego or vanity. Their industry in getting on with the job at hand; their reluctance to "poke their nose in the other fellow's business," and most of all their wide tolerance summed up in the colloquialism to "do as you've a mind to."

As the seasons moved on in sharp and vivid contrast I fell in love with that enchanted land. The first winter snowfall with its heart-piercing blue shadows; days of lacquered sunlight; sunset over Lake Champlain with its muted colors and mystical silences. Like many others before me, I became a converted Vermonter.

Surely, here was life's deepest fulfillment. At last—at long last—I had come home.

Or so I thought. But I should have known better. God plucks us out of our smug contentment once we have pledged ourselves to the Quest.

And so it was with me. In 1946, I became suddenly and mysteriously ill. It was as though a lurking vulture swooped, began to nibble, then to devour my total vitality. I, who had functioned at peak tide, mentally and physically, year in and out, pausing only for a begrudged few hours of sleep, was struck down by a relentless and immobilizing prostration.

This is only fatigue, I rationalized—nature flashing a stop light after long service to that most strenuous of all professions, international journalism. Year after

year of impending deadlines, not for one paper but for hundreds all over the world which were members of my syndicate. Always I was aware of the waiting presses. Sundays and holidays were ignored. Often on ocean crossings, I kept at work in my cabin resisting alluring invitations to join in the fun.

Foreign correspondents live not in today, not in tomorrow, but in day after tomorrow. There was one day in Bucharest which stands out as typical. I had interviewed separately each member of the Rumanian Royal family: Dowager Queen Marie, King Carol, ex-King Michael and Queen Elizabeth of Greece. That night I had written and filed my stories, suddenly remembering at three in the morning that I had had no food except breakfast coffee.

So was it any wonder I was tired? Perhaps, I thought, this is what used to be called nervous prostration. Except that I was in no sense nervous. For the first time, my storm-tossed craft had sailed into snug harbor.

I made stout resolutions. I would ignore it. I would rest. I would cut out all social activities and shorten the hours spent at my typewriter. My book publisher must wait. Friends advised their special "chin-up" cults. I turned to those formerly scorned best-sellers with their pseudo-psychology of "heave-ho-my-hearties!" I pulled valiantly on the bootstraps until they were frazzled and there was no longer any stretch for all my tugging. The exhaustion continued. The weakness spread to the muscles and it was only by enormous will power that I got out of bed.

Finally, the doctors were consulted. Our Vermont town is the seat of a state university with a Grade-A medical college and so was not lacking in professional skill. But one by one the malady defied them. Then began the long trek to the great research institutions.

It was late afternoon. Pale sunlight of a tardy Baltimore spring struggled through the narrow window of my room in the Johns Hopkins Hospital and tempered the level gray gaze of Metabolic Specialist Dr. John Eager Howard. A sheaf of reports in his hand recorded the results of a solid month of tests and examinations. He was now ready to offer an opinion.

The diagnosis was clear enough. I was suffering from a disease just beginning to be talked about. Hypoproteinemia. Due to some freak of my metabolism, I was unable to maintain my blood proteins at a normal level.

It didn't sound at all alarming. "Yes," I said eagerly, "something like vitamin deficiency?"

Gravely, he shook his head and tried to present the situation in lay terminology. "Proteins," I was told, "are building blocks of protoplasm, essential constituents of all living cells."

Since I still looked somewhat bewildered, he laid it on the line:

"What I'm trying to tell you is that your body is *made* of proteins, inside and out; tissue, muscles, arteries, glands, skin, bones, hair, teeth, eyes—all contain protein, are maintained and rebuilt by protein."

He didn't have to hit me over the head with the Empire State Building for even me to see then that proteins occupied, in relation to health, a position of *sine qua non*. Not the cream in the coffee—but the coffee itself!

In my own case the total count was one-third of normal and constantly hitting the toboggan. Hence, the exhaustion and weakness which had sapped my former vitality and left me feeling about as rugged as a paper doll.

Something had to be done about it!

So much for the diagnosis.

"And the prognosis?" I asked.

"Your problem has failed to yield to ordinary therapy."

"You mean there is no cure?"

"Please," he said, "in these days of modern medicine we must not take a last-ditch stand. Many research men are becoming more and more protein-conscious."

Then he became vague and I became alarmed.

"How long, Doctor?"

It is never a fair question and any physician is justified in becoming deliberately lost in the underbrush of ambiguities.

But being a realist, I wanted to know. Came the ageless cry of the writer which takes priority over all ties on earth and, I suspect, in Heaven:

"You must give me time to finish my book."

He remained silent. I appealed to him as one pro-

fessional worker to another. One could write, I urged, within the framework of whatever time was left.

He walked over to the window. When I saw him brace his shoulders, I realized he had reached a decision. Being of my own generation, he knew I could take it.

He turned. "All right, I'll tell you. Unless some method is found to prevent your loss of proteins, with medical supervision and rest I would give you perhaps—five years."

Then as if he could not bear to give so short a sentence, he hurriedly added: "But don't take my word for it. You are young—and there are several knowledgeable men in this field. Go now to Dr. Fuller Albright in Boston."

And he was gone. The sunlight, too. The room was filled with shadows. I have always been so aware of the horrible truth of what Oscar Wilde called "the tyranny of the weak over the strong," that this trip had been stealthily undertaken while my husband was out of reach at his fishing lodge in the Canadian woods.

So now I was alone. I lay quietly thinking, at first too stunned to grasp the verdict.

Out of my tumultuous emotions, one by one, my thoughts touched and caressed my manifold blessings and hugged them to me.

I thought first of my husband. With true gentility of mind and spirit he had healed my wounds and disenchantments wrought of frustrations and compro-

mises, until the green tree of Idealism grew fresh and strong again.

I thought also of that blending of tastes and interests shared with many friends in many lands.

I could feel my dog's ears, brown and soft as velvet under my hand.

I pictured my garden. The new Parrot tulip bulbs I had helped the handyman set in last fall would be coming into bloom in their flamboyant cinquecento coloring, to be followed by that astonishingly prodigal procession of daffodils, irises, and peonies. In another week or two the espaliered apricot trees would be splashing their wild peach tint against the garden's old brick walls.

Never had human life seemed more desirable.

One touches the thought of death for oneself so tentatively and with such shocked surprise. How could it be that most of us treat such an inevitable and momentous event as a negligible incident of our lives?

Then suddenly in that hushed and darkened room:

I was isolated in a cold, blue void where neither light nor warmth could ever reach me.

Then I realized that I had drunk so deep from that earth-filled cup of happiness that I had forgotten my pledge to drink from those other waters of "eternal life." I knew also, for all my searching, how unfitted I was even to contemplate, much less accept, the thought of death.

No! The time was not yet. I would go to the other

doctor. I would make a fight for it. For once again the familiar, though erstwhile quiet voice, was sounding its eternal summons within me.

More than ever, now, *I had to know.*

3

Trek to the Hospitals

BEFORE I left the Johns Hopkins Hospital, I discovered a moral principle which I believe applies to more problems than so-called incurable disease.

Once you determine to face a difficult situation with courage it no longer requires any courage at all!

All the forces of God and Nature rush to your aid. Once the initial shock is absorbed, you know that somehow whatever suffering, frustration and anxiety loom ahead will be taken in the manner of the mountain climber—simply by putting one foot ahead at a time. And unless you are a neurotic personality your real concern is not to subject the normal activities of anyone else to the truncated existence of invalidism.

And so I determined not to involve my busy husband any more than was necessary.

I realized, of course, that I should have to tell him about the secret visit to the hospital and the resultant diagnosis. However, my doctor agreed that we did not have to reveal the dour prognosis I had wheedled out of him, and he called my plan constructive therapy

While arrangements were being made for me to see the Boston specialist, I went home. Roy had just returned from his fishing club in Canada where, fortunately for me, he had been incommunicado.

After separation, we always spent the first evening *à deux*. I planned this one to be particularly festive. Like that Englishman in darkest Africa, I always dressed for dinner. I chose my most *alive* gown—one of flame chiffon.

The table, as always, was centered with white flowers (sometimes I wonder why God bothered to make any other kind) and there were partridge served on little loaves of toast and drenched in sherry sauce. From the living room, the long recording of Tchaikovsky's *Nut-Cracker Suite* made a pleasant background for conversation.

As we sat facing each other across the candlelight, I thought I had never seen him looking so fit. He had put on a maroon dinner jacket (definitely a concession for a Vermonter) and his freshly acquired sun-tan accentuated his bright blue eyes. As any angler, when he has had a full catch, his mood was a happy one. He had also brought back some amusing stories. Here is a man, I thought, who belongs to the world of action, health and conviviality: And my resolution for carrying out my plan was strengthened.

Oh, we were very merry. . . .

After dinner we had a rousing game of gin rummy.

When he had put the table away, we sat in silence watching the birch logs light up the patina of the old Georgian mantel.

Then I told him.

Naturally, I played up the most hopeful angles though I knew very well that the smooth flow of our life together would, at best, be sharply rechanneled.

And his reaction? It was what anyone who knew him would have expected.

He said we would lick this thing. Why, with all the marvelous discoveries in modern medicine . . . We would go together to the finest specialists everywhere and keep on going until we found the answer. Nothing was of the slightest consequence but to *get me well*.

For a split second, I was tempted. After all, didn't the marriage vows say "in sickness and in health"? Why shouldn't I lean, well just a little, until I got accustomed to the fact of being ill?

The words of the Baltimore specialist sounded in my ears: "There is at present no cure for chronic hypoproteinemia . . . at best under specialized treatment and care I would give you five years. . . ."

I pulled myself up short and thought of my husband. What a waste it would be of his time and brains and energy—to say nothing of the toll it would take of his naturally happy and optimistic nature.

And I thought also of what it would mean to very many others. The dream of his life—the medical center for Vermont—was becoming a reality. He had initiated a drive to raise one and a half million dollars ("an unheard-of undertaking in this neck of the woods," he himself had said). But I and all the rest of Vermont knew that he and only he could do it. I thought of the

many personal sacrifices he had made and continued to make in order to start the fund with a substantial contribution . . . of the years of work on the project which still lay ahead.

Parts of a speech he had made to launch the campaign echoed in my mind. He had told a vast audience of the need for such a hospital. He had spoken of babies sleeping in dresser drawers. Of desperately ill farm people driving over the ice and snow of mountain roads, often in the middle of the night, only to be turned away for lack of hospital accommodation. When he had finished, he had the whole town with him.

I thought of the little old-fashioned New England building which housed his office—the stairs worn thin by people coming to set their problems before him and going away with the best he could give them, both material and spiritual. I thought of the young men and women he had put through college. (And though I could not know it then, it did not surprise me when his service to the community was publicly recognized a few years later when his Alma Mater, the University of Vermont, awarded him an honorary degree.)

Just now he was saying he would start canceling his engagements . . . those board meetings in Boston and Montpelier . . . the hospital meetings. There were long-distance calls to make. But as he started for the telephone I detained him.

Offering a cigarette I said casually, but firmly, "Look, there's only one way to reach a Vermonter and

that is to make a deal with him—pull no punches and drive a stiff bargain. So I'll cut through all the red tape and make you an offer. I'll consent to remaining at home during this illness between whatever hospital trips which might be necessary only on one condition. And that is that you let me attend to everything alone—doctors, hospital admissions and treatment. You must go ahead with your life just as usual and above all you are not to treat me as an invalid and we are not to talk about it."

I could see that I wasn't getting very far . . . in fact I wasn't getting anywhere at all.

Then as in love-making (there are no new ways to say deep-down things)—I resorted to clichés. I said that the only way he could help me was to help me to help myself. That he should treat me as he would wish to be treated under similar conditions and I summed it up with that crisp Vermontism: "And that's all there is of it!"

I arose, adding, "And now if you'll be good enough to hand over my winnings from this evening's game, I'll say good night."

Dogs are wonderful in many ways and in crisis they sometimes create a welcome diversion. A routine in our home was for our setter and pointer to escort me upstairs for a good-night pat and a biscuit, then to romp down again for their master to take them out for a walk.

My getting up was the signal. Any rebuttal which he might have made to my proposition was drowned in the happy and noisy barking. So off we went.

I didn't hear them come in. But the next morning I took one look at my husband as he was setting off for his usual crowded schedule and I knew his common sense and good sportsmanship had won my argument.

The deal was closed!

In Boston, Dr. Fuller Albright, after running a series of metabolic tests, pronounced my protein problem a most unusual one, the cause being obscure. He said as far as he knew there was not another like it in medical history.

His therapy, plasma infusions. This elevated the protein count. I was given at intervals what seemed like hundreds. But the effect was so temporary that in the end it was discontinued, and like his Baltimore colleague, he referred me to still another specialist.

Then, like a football on a forward pass, I was handed from one name specialist to another. In Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Boston, I was sent not to one specialist, but to several in different hospitals in the same city. Their names starred my voluminous case history making it read like a Burke's Peerage of the medical profession.

Each contributed far beyond the ordinary expenditure of time, study, and personal effort in trying to come upon the cause of my ailment. This, because I had become a "unique problem" which challenged their imagination. And because each was pitting his arsenal of scientific skill against Time itself.

Some of the intricate and time-consuming tests were reported in medical journals and I heard that it

was not uncommon at medical meetings for the doctors who had treated me to go into a huddle to exchange ideas.

I shall not describe the monotonous round of hospitalization, each doctor insistent upon repeating the gamut of tests; the various therapies; biopsies; consultations; operations; the soaring hope promised by new experiments, followed by crushing disappointments—all dully familiar to those labeled, as was I, “incurable.”

The world and time moved on. But I, who had been an active participant in contemporary affairs and in the crises of history, was *hors de combat*.

Days, weeks, months dragged by on leaden feet.

I was kept alive—and only that—by infusions of blood plasma. Then out of the darkness came word of a new discovery, human albumin—seven times more potent than blood plasma.

Dr. George W. Thorn, medical chief of Boston’s Peter Bent Brigham Hospital and Hersey professor of medicine at Harvard University, had been a pioneer in the clinical application of the albumin—proving it safe for human usage.

After studying my case history, he agreed to see me.

From my window at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, I looked out upon lowering skies and city-smudged snow banks. It was one of New England’s drab midwinter days.

But I shall always recall it as one of the jubilee days

of my calendar since it was to mark what appeared to be an extension of my life sentence.

At exactly two o'clock Dr. Thorn strode into the room, his stiffly starched long white coat sailing out like a kite in the wind, to the tail of which was attached a coterie of assistants, nurses, and worshipful medical students. The excitement of a scientist about to launch a new experiment intensified his blue eyes and seemed to heighten the oriflamme of bright-orange hair.

Human albumin was hard to come by; most of the output was limited and was still being released under government regulations. The precious fluid Dr. Thorn held in his hands was in a crude G.I. container. He, himself, supervised the setting up of the infusion apparatus and left implicit directions. Though the amount to be given was only one hundred grams (about a tumblerful) due to its potency, it had to be inducted into my veins at a rate of not more than thirty-six drops a minute, the entire process requiring about three hours.

That night I slept well. When I awakened, I felt gloriously buoyant with health. For the first time since I had been ill, I began to sing a little tune:

"Lift up your eyes to the stars,
Lift up your heart and be glad."

I don't know where it came from. No doubt I had made it up, but it was very gay and to me highly sig-

nificant. For years I had unconsciously sung it when things were going well. Some of my close associates used to say it was an infallible barometer of the day ahead!

I leapt out of bed. I did a hop skip and jump and felt an irrepressible sense of well-being. I picked up my phone and called my husband.

"I'm cured," I said. "Hurray!"

"How do you know?" he asked with his Vermont practicality. "Isn't it too soon to tell?"

"I know," I replied, "because already this morning I've outlined two magazine articles, and thought out a difficult section of my book." (Long since abandoned.)

Though I knew I should see Dr. Thorn later that day, in the first flush of ecstasy I wrote him a letter.

I told him that my joy of discovery of his elixir of life was comparable to that of Sir Arthur's when he came at last upon the Holy Grail!

Later, Dr. Thorn came in. This time alone.

He was pleased that I had lost the muscular weakness and breathless exhaustion. And though the protein count could not be definitely ascertained until after my blood test had been reported, he ventured with boyish enthusiasm:

"I'll bet you five dollars your protein levels are normal!"

"I'll bet you ten dollars they are, too," I countered.

After our excitement had subsided, he explained what could be expected of the new material.

"It is not a cure. In laboratory tests on animals we

find that it remains in the system from eight to ten days, the effects diminishing gradually."

"But what of it?" I was not to be downed. "Look at people who are kept alive on insulin!"

He refused to pursue that analogy.

The blood test showed, for the first time since my illness, that my protein levels were normal. But with each passing day the euphoria diminished until on the eighth day all symptoms returned and a blood test revealed that the protein levels were back doing business (and a very bad business) at their less-than-one-third-of-normal stand.

Many more infusions followed with the same results, until at last it was decided to send me back to my home in Vermont, where I should take the infusions every ten days and return once a month for further studies.

In leaving, Dr. Thorn reiterated that this was only a stop-gap treatment. The albumin could not be used indefinitely; his hope was that it would maintain me in life until some cure was discovered. Rest was still the most important part of the therapy. I was to live under a regimented regime with possibly a couple of hours out of bed during the whole of the twenty-four.

But when for a long time you have known an exhaustion like that of one who, weighted with lead, tries to lift his feet from the bottom of the sea, the briefest respite is a welcome sign. It was a reminder of how I should feel when I was fully cured, which I never once doubted I would be.

4

Seeking the Luxury of Silence

I OPENED my eyes.

The bleak hospital room which for so long had cramped my horizons had expanded and I was conscious of liberating space.

Gone was the one small window which, by some unwritten law among hospital architects, seems designed to give always upon brick walls. In its place were five picture windows which brought into my room the whole of Vermont's breath-taking landscape. Pink and white mists of blossoming pear and apple were flung upon the air, and into my senses crept New England's annunciation of spring—the clean, fresh scent of lilacs.

Trees and flowers were touched with that peculiar quality of Vermont's sun-and-wind burnished air, making each leaf and petal stand forth separately and luminously, as though lit from within. There were the smoky-blue Adirondacks and Lake Champlain lying diamond-splintered under the bright sun.

I was in my large studio-room in Vermont. It was,

in every detail, what Virginia Woolf has called "A Room of One's Own"—a room which guards the tools of a writer's craft and his essential privacy and so is his most precious spot on earth. My eyes sped first to the open wall-shelves where lived my favorite books, any one of which my hand could reach in the dark. Then to the workmanlike desk holding my typewriter and flanked by autographed portraits of scores of personages I had interviewed. Then to my piano, where I found inspiration when words halted and ideas limped.

This was no decorator's room. Its "period," if any, was Renaissance; its "motif," ecclesiastical. Its "color-scheme," rust and copper and gold, with old apricot walls and a ceiling the blue of the Mediterranean when the sun blots up its harsher tones. The windows were hung with *toile de Jouy* floor-length draperies to shut out the night's dark windowpanes and to shut in that something more than coziness which the Germans call *Gemütlichkeit*.

Here were my small treasures gathered painstakingly from many travels in many lands. Over the mantel hung Titian's "Magdalen" and when the birch logs were lighted the blue and henna oils of the Venetian master blended with the subdued colors of the wall-to-wall rug which had been a gift of the Turkish Government. From her recessed niche, the della Robbia Madonna smiled gently down, as if to reward me for searching for her all over Italy before I came upon her in one of the small shops lining the Ponte Vecchia. There was the porcelain statue of the Infant of Prague

brought from its native land, who was said to bring blessings to a household; the reliquary, which had once held a relic of a saint; an icon once venerated by a devout Catholic family of Old Russia; and the rosary blessed for me by Pius XI when I had interviewed the Holy Father. These were only my cherished trifles but they meant home to me.

Though the specialists were agreed that my failure to utilize proteins was a unique problem for which they could discover no answer, *I* was to discover that to be in that half world of invalidism was not in the least unique. I had learned that the famous research hospitals to which I had gone are generally the last resort after local diagnosis and treatment have failed. And to my astonishment, I was told that 80 per cent of the cases were dismissed with their problems unresolved.

One of several situations results, depending on the patient's financial status, the attitude of his family, and, most of all, on the patient himself. The majority of cases ticketed chronic find themselves in homes for the incurable (and how I wish they would not call them that!), or as in my case, they are treated at home on a hospitalized regime. The patient either succumbs to the defeatist attitude and accepts the doctors' verdict or determines to do whatsoever and go whithersoever is necessary to regain full vitality and usefulness.

The greatest difficulty in carrying out Dr. Thorn's treatment was gaining ingress into my veins. At the hospital it was not uncommon for the resident physician to call up reinforcements. A familiar sight was a

group of doctors huddled around my bed in various postures of bending and kneeling, sweating and swearing, trying to inject the transfusion needle. We tried to make jokes about it. They damned my veins as being not human but those of a robin. In rebuttal, I said that perhaps this, like small feet and hands, was a mark of Southern aristocracy! And the scrimmage went on.

Under the best conditions it was painful, it was nerve-racking. Sometimes it required several hours and often the veins of hands, arms and ankles were black and blue from the performance. This was followed by more hours of lying motionless while the viscous albumin plopped in, drop by pedestrian drop.

In Vermont we had the same difficulty, only more so. All the general practitioners seemed unable to give me transfusions because they were simply unable to penetrate a vein. They said they couldn't, but they had to—and so, as at the hospitals—they finally did.

For a few days after the transfusions I felt a grateful flurry of strength, and tests showed a rise in the blood protein levels. Then I reacted like the laboratory research animals. On about the fourth day there was a diminution of its boosting effects, and after a week, I was in exactly the same state as before the treatment.

At regular intervals I returned to Dr. Thorn and Dr. Kendall Emerson, Jr. in Boston, who were working on the case. It was Dr. Emerson who told me once in an informal tête-à-tête that in his opinion the nonutilization of proteins starts in childhood. Nowadays, if it is caught in its incipency, children are given treat-

ment (including the copious feeding of ripe bananas) with the result that hypoproteinemia is arrested.

Dr. Thorn's treatment was followed for two or three years by my shuttling back and forth between Vermont and Boston. Many of his colleagues were of the opinion that the infusion of albumin into my system lessened the remote possibility of my own chemistry somehow righting itself. Though they were not sure how or if this could be accomplished either! Dr. Thorn agreed that the albumin was not a cure and not the ideal therapy, but in his opinion it not only made it possible for me to be out of bed a few hours a day, but it was the only thing that kept me alive.

During this time, I was sent to other specialists who might contribute a different therapy. In each case, those who had opposed the transfusions ended by returning me to the treatment, the rationale being that when the protein count dropped to a level of fatality, they couldn't "let the patient die."

Because of his vast knowledge of protein metabolism, Dr. Robert Loeb was finally prevailed upon to see me. Though he was no longer in private practice, that great chief of New York's Medical Center studied my reports and graciously consented to see me for an informal discussion. The first thing he said when I appeared in his office was: "I am amazed, with your protein levels so low, to see you out of bed. In fact, you are the only patient with hypoproteinemia I have ever seen who didn't lie in bed and look at the ceiling!"

Even more firmly I resolved to prevent that worse-than-death situation happening to me. Like all the

other specialists, Dr. Loeb agreed that rest was the most essential therapy. Very well. I would go home and do just that, until some of the research being done on proteins might yield an answer.

When I outlined my plan to a young member of my husband's family, she said, "You'll never be able to rest at home. Your friends and those who love you most will kill you!"

Her paradoxical pronouncement was born of having cracked up with tuberculosis, which did not become an arrested case until three years of hospitalization, after she had discovered that rest was not to be had at home.

But being by temperament of an optimistic cast and endowed by nature with what my old Mammy Addie used to call "gumption," I planned my campaign of Operation Rest. From my bed, I directed the running of my household and kept it to that smooth clicking perfection demanded by New England standards. I sought solid counsel from the works of reputable psychologists and writers on psychosomatic medicine. I mastered the tricks of the trade and fought discouraging moods as though they were sea serpents and devils.

Among the "must" resolutions were: To imbue my environment with as much normality as possible; to veto mentioning my illness to anyone save the doctors; to eschew the whining voice of the long-term invalid; to keep up my appearance by choosing the most becoming and gayest garments for those long periods in bed; and foremostly to rest, rest, rest, and to enforce

the doctors' order on my door: *One visitor a day for one hour only.*

One by one the "musts" fell like ninepins hit by a crack bowler. I had the same experience as had Betsey Barton, about which she wrote in her fine book *Now to Live Again*. I, too, discovered that there is a universal barrier between the rugged and the ragged in health. The former have no measuring rod for gauging the limitations of the latter. They will not clear a space about the patient to give the quiet rhythms of nature a chance to assist in healing.

I found that even the best-intentioned caller simply could not understand that "visiting" required any exertion, so long as the patient was in a horizontal position. But I and all my doctors knew that it did. That of all activities (and I came not to exclude ditch digging) "visiting" required the greatest output of energy.

Except for the hours when I was actually asleep, callers descended on me like hordes of locusts and wrought equal destruction. All were piqued by my maid's courteous attempts to obey instructions. And they sought out many inventions to gain access to my bedroom. There were the "just a minute" type whose minute stretched into hours. All claimed to be my "oldest and closest" friends, which obviously entitled them to a diplomatic passport. There were those who considered themselves specially considerate by offering "to do all the talking." They were, I believe, the worst offenders.

Most of us are so conditioned to the social amenities

that conversation automatically demands an exchange. Consequently, those who protectingly forbade me a nod or a monosyllable to show that I was still alive, or a word which might possibly introduce a subject of interest to *me*, placed me in a conversational strait jacket. I became a one-man audience to that most boresome form of social intercourse—the monologue.

And I had not reckoned with the telephone.

Except for the neurotic or congenitally lazy, I believe any normal person dislikes getting trapped at the end of a telephone receiver. I am sure that was not the purpose of Mr. Bell's invention and when many of my friends ingeniously decided to visit via that method, I regretted that the idea had ever struck him.

In order to sound cheerful, I dredged the bottom of the barrel of my reserves. Though my family and doctors had explained that chronic hypoproteinemia in point of fatality was as grave as tuberculosis or cancer, all of my phone callers greeted my effort with: "But your *voice* sounds so well."

It was not until this became a pointless and not-to-be-borne routine that, like O. O. McIntyre under similar circumstances, I retorted: "But, you see, it's not my *voice* that's sick." But all I got for that was that I must feel pretty fit to be up to wisecracking. And more "visiting."

So one by one the "must" resolutions became my undoing. Had I not "put my best foot forward" my friends might have realized how very ill I was. For it

is "the squeaking wheel that gets the grease." However, I won the palm from my Vermont neighbors in whose eyes the unpardonable complaint is "complainin'."

The invasion of my privacy occasioned what was to me a far more disturbing situation than the further depletion of my health. I knew that as the fires of the physical burn low it requires more than ordinary effort to keep the flame of the spirit alight. My daily schedule for years had included definite hours for meditation and devotional reading. It was still my belief that growth in the knowledge and love of God was what we were on earth *for*. But now my life was cheviéd and hedged about by people and I felt like a fish out of water, gasping to return to my native element.

My aching need was for solitude and silence in order to shut out the senses of the world; to retreat into that deep abyss of the soul where one is carried to the Mountain of Vision. In book after book after book I found this corroborated by those seeking spiritual advance.

Also I was beginning to estimate the disintegrating effects of idleness. Since I was a young woman I had allied myself—not of necessity but with voluntary eagerness—with the workers of the world. Instinctively, and later from experience, I knew the value of constructive effort for the individual. Twenty years of strenuous activity lay behind me—millions of words pounded out of heart and soul and highest intellectual effort.

To those who look upon work as slavery, I discovered in sickness, as had others, that it is the greatest freedom. I recalled Clara Clemens telling me that her father, Mark Twain, had felt this also and had expressed it when she, herself, began to write: "Work—keep everlastingly at it, for it is the darlingest gift of the gods."

Ruth Bryan Owen Rohde, our first ambassadress, had repeated to me her mother's advice when Ruth's personal life had tumbled about her ears: "Work, for it is the universal panacea."

I recalled one of Frank Case's favorite stories which had the same theme: A hard worker found himself, after death, in a place where his every desire was granted, provided that he remained idle. Finally, he became bored with indolence, satiated with pleasure. Seeking out the Keeper, he complained: "I'm afraid I don't much like being in Heaven, after all." Whereupon the Keeper threw back his head and laughed. "Didn't you know? This isn't Heaven, it's Hell."

Work, then, for every human being—from the man tilling his small plot of land to the wife and mother creating a home—contributes to psychological and physical soundness. But for the writer to be silenced is death. To give expression to his innermost thoughts is the very essence of his being.

Monsignor Ronald Knox, England's literary priest, has gone so far as to compare writing to the Act of Creation. "Perhaps," he writes, "we may compare that overflowing of God's goodness which resulted in creation . . . to what happens when an author simply

'has' to write. Getting the thing down on paper isn't vanity; it's just the craving for self-expression."

Evidence of my "getting the thing down on paper" is in the fly leaf of my Sixth Grade Reader. Jilted at the age of eleven—and by the only lad in town with a pony—I proclaimed my philosophy about Men:

A kiss, a sigh, a long goodbye
And he is gone;
A glance, a curl, another girl—
But life goes on.

Then, as always, I could usually manage a certain fine detachment about romance but never about self-expression.

And so, despite my illness, those twin drives—illumination of The Word and expression through the word—still dominated my life.

I knew that fulfillment not only of these but of all my necessities lay in the promise, "Seek ye first the Kingdom and all those things shall be added unto you."

And I found also the resolution of my especial need for solitude in a more modern poet's definition of Heaven: "Those regions . . . where all that is not music is *silence*."

So, I must continue my Search.

5

Death Scene in Vermont

ONCE again I found myself in the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston. Indeed, during the last two years, I had occupied a room there so often that the staff referred to it as the Gladys Baker room.

After three weeks of repetitious tests, it seemed clear that hospitalization was not going to yield the answer. Though no substitute therapy had been found for the albumin transfusions (of which I had had about one hundred), the treatments no longer produced even brief periods of relief.

Unreasonable as it is, there comes a time when those of us caught in the deadlock of a chronic disease are tempted to write off the whole medical profession.

Such a time for me was *now*.

Lying in bed late one night, wondering where to go for a cure which was nonexistent and being as yet unwilling to accept the role of invalidism, Christian Science wheeled into my mind.

That this cult had not been neglected in my winnowing of spiritual systems was testified by a dog-

earred copy of *Science and Health* by Mary Baker Eddy.

When in fine fettle it had not been too difficult to subscribe to the optimistic angle of Christian Science thinking. And while I had respect for its high standard of ethics and for many of its followers, I had not tried Christian Science as a healing agency.

Then suddenly I was reliving an interview with Lady Nancy Astor. Like many others, I had responded to the charm and bright mentality of this fascinating Southerner who had become the wife of one of England's richest peers, mistress of Cliveden and the first woman member of Parliament. But I was more impressed with a kind of spiritual luster which overlay her personality, and which I sensed was from within.

I could hear myself asking the question I had put to her so many years ago. "Will you tell me, Lady Astor, what it is you live by?"

"Certainly," came the echo of her immediate response, "it's Christian Science. After what happened to me in 1914, I couldn't be anything else. The doctors had told me that I was facing a life term of inactivity. Someone told me about Christian Science and I sent for a practitioner. After that first meeting, I was convinced of the truth of this teaching. I regained my health and I haven't had a sick day since."

So next day, just prior to being dismissed from the hospital, I too sent for a practitioner. She was a woman of high Christian ideals and had dedicated her

life to treating the ill after the manner prescribed by her leader, Mrs. Eddy.

She told me that only by "radical reliance on Truth" could healing be accomplished. That I must abandon all medical treatment. This included doctors, diets, medication and transfusions—without which I had been told I could not live.

Somewhere deep within me I sensed that this system—being humanly contrived—might entail a vast misuse of spiritual power, but I agreed to the requirements. The practitioner would give me "absent treatments" and I could reach her via the telephone.

I returned home, and without telling anyone, followed instructions. My physical condition steadily worsened until one afternoon, I looked intimately on the face of death.

It was the maid's afternoon out and except for my French-Canadian housekeeper, there was no one in the house.

Lying alone in my room, I felt a numbness start in my hands and feet and begin spreading to every part of my body. It was like a creeping paralysis.

For hours I was in and out of consciousness.

The icy numbness crept on—over my senses, into my brain, into my heart.

What amazed me was my own reaction. On those rare occasions when I had allowed my conscious mind to encompass death, I had assumed that the spiritual armory mustered by my Search would, at the final hour, give me peace and serenity. For in all the reli-

gious philosophies a common tenet was the belief that death was only an emergence into wider horizons of eternal life.

So confident was I that this was my own belief that at times—when the event was not so imminent—I had, with the writer's instinct, dramatized it.

Perhaps I would go out with a memorable quote after the manner of Socrates or Epictetus!

In any case, I had believed that ordinary human courage would see me through. Perhaps I might even mark my departure with a gallant phrase that would be cheering to my worldly friends, such as "Bon voyage! It's been good hunting!"

But now that the shadows were thickening fast within and without and the silence of death was stilling all sounds of earth, to my surprise and dismay I found I had no faith at all to support me. I was pushing against nothingness.

My mind reviewed the various schools of thought which, over the years, I had examined:

Spiritualism; Theosophy; Vedanta; Unity; Buddhism; Buchmanism; Occultism; the Arcane School; New Thought; Christian Science. Though their central dogmas stood forth clearly, none of them proved functional in bridging this yawning abyss.

So much for the cults. As fascinating as they had been, they seemed now like toys for the adolescent. And at such an hour, the least one could do was strive for the psychological competence of an adult personality.

And so I groped back to the three great pioneers of

psychoanalysis: Adler, Freud, Jung—the Trinity of the 20th Century.

It was they who had made into household words such esoteric terminology as libido, complex, sex motivation, fixation, repression, transference, dream symbolism, the id.

Perhaps they could serve me now. During the next lucid interval I relived my interviews with the towering Triumverate, but I now challenged each of them with my present quandary.

Over our coffee cups in Vienna that male Pollyanna, Dr. Alfred Adler, was expounding his "Inferiority Complex" as the basis of all human difficulties. "I doubt if any of your patients ever presented you with a more overwhelming 'Inferiority' than I do at this moment, Papa Adler. Does your compensatory theory resolve also this business of dying?"

"And you, Dr. Sigmund Freud? Ah, the sex motivation is all, is it? Well, I have only one 'suppressed desire' at the moment—the universal one that comes to every human being on his deathbed, as I wager it came also to you—the desire for the continuity of consciousness. I'm afraid your 'liberation through sex' won't open the door to Heaven, Herr Doctor. For at this last accounting, my only passion is the passion to blot out the shabby sins and compromises.

"And you, Dr. Carl Jung, the greatest of them, admitted that you had never cured any adult patient who was not able to embrace some form of religion. But you failed to tell us how to go about it. Was that because you yourself, Dr. Jung, simply did not be-

lieve? Could you tell me, Dr. Jung, just how to make *this* adjustment? How to break the 'transference,' not of psychoanalyst and patient, but that more formidable one existing between soul and body?"

The intervals between consciousness were stretching out. Literally, I was now unable to move any part of my body—even a finger—and I was in the grip of such icy cold that I felt cast in marble. Each time I regained awareness, I tried desperately to hang on to it. I must seize some essence of faith if only to redeem myself in my soul's esteem.

The cults and modern psychology having failed, my thoughts swung back to Orthodoxy. What had my own church to offer?

I had grown up in the Episcopal Church, sung in its choir, continued to support it and to attend its services about as regularly as most of its members. Never had I ceased to be moved by the beauty of its liturgy. Cranmer's matchless prose of the *Book of Common Prayer* still pulsed lyrically in blood inherited from generations of Episcopal forebears.

And yet, at this final hour, the faith of my fathers gave me no faith at all.

For it had not taught me how to die. How to prepare my soul. What to expect when the spirit flashes forth from the cold clay of the flesh.

Spiritually and aesthetically, I was shocked. Surely a soul should be treated with more dignity and ushered forth on its journey with more fitting ceremonies.

It never occurred to me to summon our Rector even

had I been able to do so—for the very simple reason that I had never known a Protestant to ask for his minister at the moment of death. So even in such a crisis, which seemed to me more and more a matter to be dealt with by a specialist of the Spirit, my mind shied away from such unconventional behavior.

Face facts. I knew I was going to die and I had no faith whatsoever. Nor did I actually believe in immortality. Then to my utter humiliation, for the first time in my life, I knew stark, unmitigated terror.

Helpless, I needed help. But where to find it? Not in Christian Science. Being so close to death, I could hear in the pat formula "There is no death" only a mockery.

Nor did I want the human and loving presence of my family. In this issue they, too, would feel their inadequacy; nor could I bear to witness their despair.

My thought touched lightly my many friends whose wit and charm and erudition had given me most pleasure. And as lightly discarded them. Then like Pasteur, whose scientific search for Truth resulted in his longing for the simple faith of a Breton peasant, I suddenly realized the one person I wanted near me. My housekeeper. A devout Roman Catholic, her religion gave her unquestioning faith in the Hereafter.

Also I had often heard from her lips that paradoxical phrase peculiar to Catholics: "A happy death." I knew, too, in a vague way, that her Church stressed the transience of this life and the relative unimportance of its values compared with those of eternal life.

As if in answer to my wish—for I was unable to touch the bell scarcely three inches away on my bedside table—the door opened quietly and she stood beside me; a wisp of a person, old and gnarled, with the sturdy character of the Quebec farm-folk from whom she had sprung. She recognized my plight and stood there silently holding my hand which felt no response to her toil-roughened fingers.

In the deeply lined parchment face, her small eyes blazed like blue sparks struck from the anvil of the Spirit. She turned her gaze upward and I knew she was summoning her Blessed Virgin and all the Saints of Heaven to intercede for me.

Something happened there in that room. I felt the touch of a Greater Presence. First a wave of interior peace washed away all fear; then gradually warmth and sensibility flushed back along feet and limbs and arms, penetrating my entire body.

No, I did not leap out of bed, fully restored to health. But I knew that the miracle of life had been restored to me. By the most incontrovertible of all proofs—that of personal experience—I knew what I had been through that long afternoon was a foretaste of death. I felt certain then (as I do now) that when death actually comes, I shall not brush against its macabre shape for so long a time and with such sharp awareness.

My mental faculties were heightened to extraordinary alertness and I attempted, as is my nature, to analyze what had happened.

I recalled an interview with the late Dr. Alexis Car-

rel, the eminent scientist, Nobel prize-winner, and author of *Man the Unknown*.

It was Dr. Carrel's profession of his belief in the objective reality of the miracles at Lourdes which had caused the sensational reception of his book and prompted my interview. He was not only newsworthy, but might offer tangible clues to guide my ever-avid quest for a spiritual philosophy.

When I introduced the subject of his Lourdes experience, he made it clear that he had observed and recorded the miracles as a man of science. At the time he was a lapsed Catholic, and though later he died in the faith, he pronounced himself an agnostic.

But that day, in spite of his professed agnosticism, there was no doubting his faith in the healing influence of prayer. He told me of having witnessed at Lourdes the healing, under his own eyes, of suppurating wounds and incurable diseases such as peritoneal tuberculosis and cancer.

As I lay in that room in Vermont—lay in the spirit of awe and peace and great humbleness which follows the direct intervention of God—the words of Dr. Carrel came back to me:

“But there is no need for the patient himself to pray, or even to possess any religious faith. It is enough that someone around him be in a state of prayer.”

6

Examining Faith of My Fathers

THE doctor arrived that evening. After hearing that I had been in and out of consciousness and in a state of immobility for four hours that afternoon, he remarked in the Vermont vernacular:

"In Heaven's name! You were dead and didn't know it."

I knew it all right. But what neither he nor anyone else knew was that it was literally "in Heaven's name" that I had survived. An emergency transfusion was ordered and the blood tests showed what he had suspected—the total protein had plunged to an unprecedented level.

At this time, a dream which had hounded me throughout my adult years returned with the force of a nightmare. Though its circumstances varied, the content was ever the same. Wandering alone and frightened through labyrinthine ways, I was lost and unable to find my way home.

I recalled Dr. Jung's interpretation of the value and significance of a recurrent dream:

"Dreams," he had said, "are the language of the unconscious. A recurrent dream will continue to repeat itself—to hammer away at the door of the conscious mind—until the underlying problem it is trying to warn you about is satisfactorily resolved."

Not only in the dream, but during my waking hours I was again conscious of the mystical experience which for a time had been crowded out by objective thoughts and pursuits. Now once again, occasionally:

I was isolated in a cold, blue void where neither light nor warmth could ever reach me.

So now there was no peace of mind either sleeping or waking, literally "no place whereon to stand." For the first time, it seemed clear to me that both the dream and the mystical experience had an identical motif. From the submerged depths of the unconscious and from that supernatural area known to mystics as the "ground of the soul," issued an overwhelming nostalgia for the spirit's eternal home.

Here was a unified command.

I had to know.

Very well then. Let the doctors take over the solving of my physical problems. I had business with quite another matter. So peremptory and absorbing was its nature that I seemed to function beyond that pale shape lying attached daily to a transfusion apparatus.

As unemotionally and factually as I had undertaken my newspaper assignments, I addressed myself with resolution to the job at hand. First of all, I felt the need of allying myself with a church whose doctrines included definitive and authoritative teachings con-

cerning the universal issues of life and death and man's destiny beyond his ephemeral earthly span.

In the month following my brush with death, I had a great deal of hospitalization. In one New England city, I rang up the Episcopal rectory to ask if one of the most outstanding ministers of that community would pay me a sick call. An efficient secretary said she was sorry, but the rector was engaged for the next several days as chairman of a civic drive for a better housing project and could the "parish visitor" come to "cheer me up."

Only with difficulty did I refrain from remarking that I, too, was interested in a housing project and that I would like some plans and specifications for one of those "mansions eternal in the skies." Instead, I thanked her politely and said would she ask the rector to come when he could get around to it.

One morning, a week later, he "got around to it." Like most Episcopal clergymen he could be described under the "three C's"—culture, courtesy, and charm.

In a section where good works took priority in ministerial rating I had heard that he was greatly admired by members of all faiths. Viewed from New England Protestantism he was more acceptable because he "took no stock in High Church Popery." His knowledge of current events and a fund of entertaining anecdotes made him a prize guest of any hostess.

That he enjoyed the social amenities of moderate drinking and smoking made the men pronounce him

"all right." It was considered a compliment to say of him that he never "talked shop."

Yet on the morning of his sick call, I hoped we would settle down to a solid theological discussion.

Briefly, I described the experience I had recently passed through and admitted my spiritual poverty in facing death and my lack of faith in immortality.

Reverting to the direct manner of the interviewer, I asked if he would define for me certain articles of our creed. Lest he put me off with that familiar, but to me, meaningless generalization of "everything depending on faith," I presented him with a memo listing certain tenets on which I wanted authoritative answers.

It read:

"He (Jesus) descended into Hell." (Define Hell.)

"He ascended into Heaven." (Conception of Heaven.)

"He shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead." (The church's attitude on Judgment.)

"The communion of Saints." (How do we practice this?)

"The forgiveness of sins." (By what means does one obtain absolution?)

"The resurrection of the body and Life Everlasting."

(Was each member allowed his own interpretation or was the church dogmatic on these points?)

He read the memo with as much astonishment as if it had been Luther's 95 Theses and looked as uncomfortable as if I had nailed *him* to the church door at Wittenberg.

"Well," he said, "this is as stiff as an examination for a theological degree! I don't believe you really want a dogmatic interpretation. However, let's see what we can do."

Ignoring my specific questions, he said:

"The more we have of gentleness, sympathy, love and such qualities, the more God-like we become. The real *I* thus becomes more a part of God and God more a part of the essential being.

"This growth continues after the death of the body. We can be in what we call Heaven or Hell either here or hereafter in the degree of our union with or separation from God. So-called sin, all the un-good qualities, bring about the separative life.

"The process of spiritual penetration is the moving of the veil and is continuous. It is also involved with Time—or non-Time. A glimpse of eternal life sometimes happens here when one is outside the body and can look upon it. One such glimpse is often more qualitatively vital and meaningful than a lifetime of nonperceptive living and feeling.

"Jesus had no other consciousness than his union with God. Nothing intervened. It is this consciousness that we take with us. The resurrection of the body means the awakening of spiritual awareness and can happen here and now."

All very "inspirational." But it was definitely *not* what I was after. I wanted answers as precise and crystal-clear as a mathematician's.

Perhaps I might reach him from another angle.

I told him about the recurrent dream and the

mystical experience, both of which had recently returned.

He looked dubious and evasive. But finally said, "I know the name of an excellent psychiatrist."

But I myself knew that mine was a spiritual need and could be treated only by spiritual therapy.

Hoping to make him understand this, I told him my search for Truth had gone on for many years. That it was my habit to awaken before the household was stirring in order to have an hour's meditation—to reach out and try to touch the Ineffable. My own technique, I said, had been devised from personal investigation of many cults and the ancient religions of the East. But I realized now that it was, at best, a hodgepodge.

I suggested that it was time for me to confine my thoughts and energies to the Christian religion. Was there a method of meditation used in the Episcopal communion for those who wanted to progress along the Interior Way? I said I had reached the conclusion that while God can be sought and found along many paths, we of the West must seek Him in terms of our own civilization and conditioning. And that since the perfecting of the self—not its annihilation as is taught in the East—is the cornerstone of the Christian tradition, I had decided to return to orthodoxy.

"You'll find everything you need in your own church," he assured me. "I'll send around some books that you'll find helpful in meditation."

I let him go then. The deep spirituality of this man had come through clearly in the words he had spoken

to me. That he believed in and lived by them, I had no doubt. Yet for me they failed to answer my own special need.

The memo, with none of its salient points adequately answered, lay crumpled in the ashtray. It seemed to bear ironic testimony that in this last earnest hour of seeking, the faith of my fathers had likewise been tossed into the discard.

A few days later his books arrived: Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*; Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life*; Brother Lawrence's *Practice of the Presence of God*; and *The Lives of the Saints*. I recognized them as classics from Roman Catholic literature. So rewarding were they that I was in no mood to be critical. But across my mind flashed the inconsistency that a member of one church should obtain food for his devotional life from another church from which it had severed all allegiance some four hundred years ago. It was almost, I thought, like a writer who plagiarizes, not giving credit to his source material.

Why not, I thought, go to the Fountainhead?

Why not carry my investigation into Roman Catholicism?

But that was unthinkable. Though my quest for Truth had led me into many strange bypaths away from orthodoxy, my conditioning by centuries of tradition was Protestant.

In the two sections of America where my roots went deepest I was aware of prevailing prejudices. In the

South the intolerance of the Ku Klux Klan against Catholics and other minorities had so inflamed my sense of justice that I had, with my editor, waged a campaign to smoke the Klan out of one of its most firmly entrenched bailiwicks.

With youthful zeal and fearlessness I uncovered its secret meetings; exposed its dark-of-the-moon iniquities; interviewed a farm boy whose back bore red, angry welts of the lash and learned his "guilt" to be that he was studying for the Catholic priesthood. I ferreted out the fact that some of our most prominent citizens—judges, doctors, lawyers, financial tycoons—were members. As a result, night after night a fiery cross of the hooded hoodlums blazed on my front lawn.

After World War II, I believed Hitler's persecutions had made it at least poor taste to criticize minorities. So, on later visits to the South, I was shocked to hear such vocal opposition to that inseparably linked and despised category—"Negroes, Catholics and Jews."

In Boston, one of Catholicism's few New England strongholds, my Protestant friends spoke of the "lace-curtain Irish Catholics" only a shade less snobbishly than the "Shanty Irish," the former phrase carrying the opprobrium of wealth and influence gained by unsavory political patronage.

In Vermont, my state of adoption by marriage, the Catholic Church was referred to quite openly as the "servant girl's religion."

Very well. Then it was a servant girl's religion which had brought me through that terrifying en-

counter with death. So, when I returned home, I asked my housekeeper to bring me some Catholic literature. She inundated me with pamphlets and when I scolded her for extravagance, she explained they were from pamphlet racks which were in the back of every Catholic Church.

Compiled by priests blessed with zeal but unblest with literary talent, they were totally lacking in appeal. They ignored the enormous gulf separating the birthright Catholic from the potential convert. Glibly, they disposed of such theological profundities as Original Sin; Transubstantiation; Veneration of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints; Confession; Penance; Purgatory; Heaven and Hell.

And to my neophyte soul such ordinary practices as Genuflexion, the use of Holy Water and the Rosary remained as obscure as the black arts of the Middle Ages.

The feeling I had often known—the longing to worship in a Holy Place at whatever hour of the spirit's prompting—swept over me.

In all fairness, I did not know whether all Protestant churches were bolted, but to have been seen entering one except at specified services would have marked one as, at least, eccentric. On the other hand, I knew that Catholics visited their churches at any hour of the day and into the night, as unself-consciously and as unremarked as though they were paying a visit to a friend.

But for a Protestant to be caught going in and out of the Roman church would have aroused consider-

able small-town scandal among my Vermont neighbors.

All that I should have risked, however, as well as disobeying my doctor's orders to remain in bed. But my mind shied away from the embarrassment of being confronted by practices with which I was unfamiliar. To slip into a Catholic church in between services, cloaked in the anonymity of a large city (which I had done on several occasions), was quite different from making a show of yourself before home-town people. I would feel like an impostor.

And so I put the whole thing from me.

Or at least I thought I had.

7

Linkedness of Circumstances

LATER, I began to experience that "linkedness of circumstances" which Aldous Huxley declares for those seeking the life of the Spirit is never fortuitous.

For me these were:

A book; for me *the* book; a chance meeting; the right word spoken; new friends met in unexpected ways; a scene from a film; an irresistible impulse to write a letter; an unplanned shift in environment; the choice of a hotel; a midnight marine-radio call from a yacht in the Atlantic.

I have often wondered just what was accomplished at those highly esoteric gatherings known as board of directors' meetings. From reports from my husband, who was asked to sit on many of them in many different places, I formed the opinion that they had a triple objective:

- 1 To replenish the members' repertoire of after-dinner stories.
- 2 To discuss in infinite detail the ways of the cunning partridge and the elusive salmon.

- 3 To obtain otherwise unobtainable seats for the World Series.

But one of these occasions—this one had to do with railroads, I believe—opened another path to the recovery of my health.

Seated next to my husband was Hugh Chisholm, paper magnate, sportsman *extraordinaire*, and man of many hobbies. These included the breeding of Ayrshire cattle and prize-winning Welsh terriers, and, as far as I could make out, the collecting of yachts. Serving on the board of the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, Mr. Chisholm also kept abreast with what's what in modern medicine.

One of the things you learn in a long-drawn battle for health is to avoid being referred by friends to some doctor who had worked miracles for them, or for their friends, or for friends of their friends.

Mr. Chisholm's miracle man was the young and much talked about internist and assistant physician at the Medical Center, Doctor Terence Lloyd Tyson. It was Dr. Tyson, serving in the Medical Corps with the rank of major, who was recommended by Army Chief George Marshall to the then Secretary of State Edward Stettinius to accompany President Roosevelt's official party to the Yalta Conference. General Marshall's letter suggested that Major Tyson could not only serve competently as a medical aide but could also double in brass.

It was whispered by those who attended the conference that Dr. Tyson had not only treated Winston

Churchill but had brought Comrade Stalin out of a coma when his private physician had failed. Some said that Stalin was so impressed with the American doctor's skill that he asked him to name his own salary and to return with him to Moscow.

It was not the first time Mr. Chisholm had suggested Dr. Tyson, but he is not a man who readily gives up when he sets forth as a doer of kind acts, and this was the timely moment. Dr. Thorn had advised a change from the climate of New England and had suggested New York, under proper medical attention.

Though the transfusions had been resumed, they were merely temporary props, and even these might have to be abandoned if I began having "plasma" reactions. A cure, we were told, *must* be found but no one could tell us where to go for it. So when my husband returned home, we whipped ourselves into a froth of excitement over the hope that it might be produced by this new doctor.

My voluminous case history was forwarded to him. After studying the case, he wrote that since so many of his famous colleagues had failed to find a cure, he feared he would have nothing to offer. Whereupon he boarded the Chisholm yacht *Aras* for a cruise in Florida waters.

So much for Dr. Tyson. But we had not counted on the indefatigable and persuasive Mr. Chisholm.

One midnight in July, the phone rang. It was the private operator calling from the *Aras* anchored somewhere in the Atlantic. As the air between Vermont and Florida crackled and sputtered, I heard the voice

of Commodore Chisholm: "You're to report to Dr. Tyson in New York as soon as you can get there."

Thus came about the unplanned shift in environment.

Two days later, I was seated beside Dr. Tyson's broad and tidy desk in his private Park Avenue office. The pine-paneled walls were covered with warmly inscribed photographs of celebrities, some of whom hung in my own "rogues'" gallery at home: Winston Churchill, Army Chief Marshall, Secretary Edward Stettinius, Anthony Eden, Lord Halifax, Joseph T. Grew, Will Hays, and several stars of stage and screen.

I was to become almost blasé over sharing the waiting room with Helen Traubel, Rosalind Russell, Irene Rich, Jimmie Dunn, John Mason Brown, as well as V.I.P.'s of the financial and social worlds.

The brisk streamlined name, Terry Tyson, fits him well. Young he surely is—in his early forties. Slim, dapper, eyes keenly blue behind tortoise-shell glasses, his is the face of the interested man of science. He gives you the assurance that he is not only concentrating on your particular problem while you are with him, but you feel he is going to stretch his full-steam-ahead day to put in an extra hour or so on it.

He understood that the long periods of hospitalization had built up a claustrophobic reaction against hospitals. So it was agreed that I could be under treatment in a hotel. There was a very good reason for it—though I didn't know it then—that I chose to live at the Ritz.

Since rest was the basic therapy, the hotel hospitalization still permitted me only rationed hours out of bed. This must encompass all expenditure of energy: visits to my doctor; diversions, such as seeing an occasional matinee; and visitors—one a day for one hour only. Later, by contrast, this was to seem as enviably active as a debutante's calendar.

Summer wore on and I was not allowed to return to my home in that enchanted land with its cool breezes from mountain and lake. I was held captive in the midtown hotel room. All my friends had fled the city to escape that historic and relentless heat wave of 1949.

One morning I felt impelled to see the film, *Madame Bovary*. And I found myself in one of Broadway's gigantic motion picture emporiums. I used to wonder what kind of people went to morning movies, and harbored a secret contempt against such profligacy of work-a-day hours. Taking to myself some of the opprobrium, I almost felt as if I should explain my presence to the usher. But I still did not know why I had come.

To my surprise, the film version introduced into Flaubert's masterpiece a scene of Emma Bovary receiving the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. "This," I thought as the scene opened, "is pure Hollywood." It was the first time I had witnessed the immemorial ceremony of the Last Rites.

With blessed oils, the priest made the sign of the cross upon each of the five senses, cleansing them of the taint of earthly pilgrimage, as he repeated:

"Through this Holy Unction and His most tender mercy may the Lord pardon thee, whatever sins or faults thou hast committed by sight, by smell, by taste, by touch, and by walking."

These ancient words of absolution held me spell-bound. Here surely a soul was treated with dignity and beauty, escorted "in angels' hands to a place of refreshment, light and peace." It had always shocked me that in no other save the Catholic faith was it customary to make any spiritual obeisance to death or to usher the soul out into the Dark Unknown with an appropriate ceremony. The word "viaticum" took root in my mind. How gracious, how warming, how fitting was this "bread for a journey"!

Was this what I was reaching out for that afternoon in Vermont when I faced death so unutterably lonely and alone?

Now I sensed what Chesterton meant when he told me he had entered the Catholic Church to be absolved of his sins. There was Heywood Broun, too, saying on his deathbed that had he received no other solace from his conversion to Catholicism, the Sacrament of Extreme Unction was worth all his efforts, as it had brought him peace.

That was the last film I was to see for a long time. Despite Dr. Tyson's valiant efforts there was still no cure for the rare hypoproteinemia, and the transfusions were being administered weekly.

I was never morbid or introspective about my illness and never under any circumstances referred to it unnecessarily. However, I found that my worldly and

formerly most amusing friends, who dropped in to see me when occasion brought them into the city from their summer places, had nothing to give me—or what was far worse—I to give them.

One friend, however, was different. Elsie Sloan Farley, that noted New York decorator who, I thought, was in Europe and whom I had not seen for years, came to call one afternoon. A drastic drop in the protein count had left me in breathless prostration, too weary for talk. But my professional eye spied the manuscript tucked under her arm.

She told me it was a second book by her young friend Avery Dulles on his conversion to Catholicism, which had taken place several years before while he was a student at Harvard. He was the son of John Foster Dulles, who represented generations of staunch allegiance to Presbyterianism. He was now studying at Woodstock to be a Jesuit priest.

I consented to her reading the manuscript aloud. Her soft voice soothed me and at first I heard her listlessly. Then I was arrested by the manuscript's meaning. It seemed to me that all the poetry and idealism and joy of youth were there inscribed. It was an impassioned "Song of Songs."

She must have noticed my interest, for within an hour after she had left, her maid arrived with *Testimonial to Grace* by the same author. I thought I had had quite enough of Catholicism for one day, so I put it on my bedside table.

Insomnia was with me again, as always with a decline in the protein count. That night, I turned on my

bedside light and found the small volume had fallen open at a page where the author was describing a gray February afternoon at Cambridge, when an irresistible impulse led him to desert his studies in Harvard's Widener Library to take a walk along the banks of the Charles River.

His conversion, like that of St. Francis of Assisi, had begun when he saw stark branches of a tree touched with the unfathomable life of spring.

"How could it be?" the undergraduate steeped in materialist philosophy asked himself. And I read the answer which came to him with the novelty of a revelation:

It was useless to dismiss these phenomena by obscurantist talk about a mysterious force called "Nature." The "Nature" which was responsible for these events was distinguished by the possession of intellect and will, and intellect plus will makes personality. Mind, then, not matter was at the origin of all things. Or rather not so much the "mind" . . . as a Person of Whom I had had no previous intuition.

Nor were the operations of this Person confined to flowers and foliage. The harmonious motions of the stars, the distribution of the elements and the obedience of matter to fixed laws were manifestations of the same will and plan. Looking then into myself, I beheld enormous energies coursing through the human person, the greater part of them beyond the realm of consciousness, tending constantly to preserve, to nourish and to restore the weary body and soul. These forces were not of our own making, these operations not established by ourselves. Yet they had from their

inception a legitimacy which was conferred upon them by Another—the same as Him who moved the stars and made the lilacs bloom. . . . Was it not monstrous that we, incapable of creating a hair, should undertake to dispose of our whole being, heedless of its appointed end?

Testimonial of Grace described also the obstacles and combats of conversion and perhaps because of the youth of its author it was more appealing than any I had read up to this time. It was an introduction to Avery Dulles. Little did I know that after he was in the seminary, shut off from the world, I was to hear from him again.

This book, though deeply moving, was not *the* book. That was to come as strangely as had the Dulles manuscript—which was in the possession of only one person in New York City—to forge still another link in the “linkedness of circumstances.”

That sultry, sticky August my mind, like that of eight million other New Yorkers, was on how to keep cool. Regardless of heat waves, declining health, separation from home and friends, the eternal feminine made me use my up-time once a week to put myself in the hands of Marietta of Charles of the Ritz.

I had come to know and admire Marietta. A talented painter, she had turned to a more remunerative art to make possible the career of her daughter, the gifted young opera singer Gloria Ware. On one particular morning, Marietta thrust a book into my hand:

“A Catholic convert left it—you know how zealous they are—but I’m interested in Emmet Fox. So you take it.”

I did . . . and later it “took” me.

8

The Road to Damascus

SOMEONE has said that any book worth reading should be read straight through. Long ago I had come upon this satisfactory procedure and for many years I have read on an average of a book a night. When I was a child my dolls and toys were not taken to bed with me, but an assortment of books. And so it has ever been. Not one choice but several against starting one title and finding it disappointing, or encountering a shift in reading mood.

And so the night after I was handed *The Road to Damascus*, I replenished my source of supplies, for I feared it might turn out to be a treatise on Catholicism. Scattered across my bed were two late mysteries, a book on contract-bridge strategy, a biography, a novel, and a forbidding tome on the state of the world. However, all these remained unopened while I went lickety-split through the slender red volume. Then for several nights following I gave it intensely concentrated study.

Here was sharp departure from any book I had seen

on Catholicism. Compiled by John A. O'Brien, Ph.D., Oxford graduate, and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, it was a masterful innovation in editorship. Whereas books of Catholic doctrine per se had repelled me—as they have others—here was a fresh breeze cutting across the ordinarily stuffy presentation of philosophers and theologians.

Himself a gifted writer, Father O'Brien had reached out and culled from outstanding writers of England, Canada and the United States fifteen original essays on their conversion to Catholicism. The contributors were from the top drawer of literary aristocracy. Here was a group of intellectuals revealing the most intimate experiences leading to their finding of security at last in the arms of Mother Church. And revealing it as if a Pentecostal coal had touched their lips.

Father O'Brien knew the power of the word and the word of power. The result—lucid literary attractiveness suited to our times and mentality. Written by writers, its appeal to another writer was swift, direct and sympathetic. Here were *diverse* avenues along which another pilgrim soul could walk in the direction of Rome and not feel in the company of strangers.

Evelyn Waugh, British satirist, critically acclaimed as one of the most brilliant stylists of our times:

“Come inside. You can not know what the Church is like from the outside.”

Fulton Oursler, editor of *Readers' Digest*, whose *The Greatest Story Ever Told* revived the Scriptures for reader and radio audience:

"To all those who are attracted and yet frightened and reluctant, I say there is no way to peace on earth except in the footsteps of the Master."

Frances Parkinson Keyes, wife of a former United States Senator and a cosmopolite, whose novels such as *Dinner at Antoine's* and *Came a Cavalier*, hold an enormous public:

"I was impressed that the Church considered it not unsuitable to mingle secular and sacred joys, and with the essential joyousness of Catholicism as contrasted to the essential austerity of Puritanism."

Rosalind Murray, former wife of the great historian Arnold Toynbee and daughter of Prof. Gilbert Murray and Lady Mary Howard:

"Catholicism has been for me the door to a limitless new world of knowledge. If I were to sum up in one word its most essential gift . . . I would say Life."

Douglas Hyde, former British Communist leader and Editor of the *London Daily Worker*, was drawn to the Church by the Encyclicals of Leo XIII and of Pius XI and Pius XII stressing justice and social rights.

Senator Robert F. Wagner, who wrote some of our most important labor and social legislation, was attracted by the life and example of his Catholic associates.

Professor Ross J. S. Hoffman, historian, who came to the Church after penetrating historical research:

"I came to see that the Church was the mother of the new learning, the founder of the great universities, the inspiration of the great new architecture . . . the defender of popular liberty, the very citadel and source of European culture. It had created the most attractive and inspiring civilization of which I knew anything at all."

Theodore Maynard, poet and biographer, who had studied for the Congregational ministry:

"My acceptance of the truth of Catholicism reposed, it seemed to me, in common sense."

Willis D. Nutting, historian, Rhodes scholar, and former Anglican clergyman:

"If I were to name the greatest gain that comes from entry into the Church I would say that it is *depth*."

Owen Francis Dudley, also an Anglican clergyman who became a Catholic priest:

"When the Catholic church defines a doctrine of faith and morals she is prevented by God from teaching untruth. If I did not believe in an infallible teaching approved and appointed by God, then nothing on earth would induce me to believe in the Christian religion."

Sheila Kaye-Smith, English novelist, who with her husband T. Penrose Fry, Anglo-Catholic clergyman, turned to Catholicism:

"I expected to find dryness, coldness, unscrupulousness and unspirituality. Of course I did not find them, but the heart's release."

George B. Harrison, Professor of English at Queens University, Ontario:

"Catholicism is not a matter of subscribing to certain dogmas or of performing certain ritual actions. It is a way of life . . . infinitely and increasingly satisfying."

Dr. Kenneth Simon, Jewish psychiatrist who renounced his faith and took Holy Orders for the Catholic priesthood:

"Thus did I, a Jew, without becoming less a Jew, become a Catholic. The life into which I was born was continued, ever growing greater—this is the life of God."

There were two contributors to *The Road to Damascus* whose names recurred constantly in my mind. Not only because their essays were brilliantly convincing but because their background and temperament were not dissimilar to my own. Clare Boothe Luce, ex-Congresswoman, author and playwright, and Gretta Palmer, whose path had often crossed mine

when we were both foreign correspondents, though we had never met.

I played with the idea tentatively of writing to them but decided that both these peripatetic observers of world affairs would be at the ends of the earth. It was now August and still no single breeze to break that wall of heat which enveloped the eastern seaboard.

Besides, I had heard of the zeal of converts and I was reluctant to place myself in the vulnerable position of being "worked on." If I should ever write to either of them, I must be very coony. It would be a carefully plotted letter maintaining that guarded approach used by most Protestants—that I wished only to be "steered to some Catholic reading."

Then one morning under most unpropitious circumstances, I had an irresistible urge to get off a letter to Gretta Palmer. (In his biographical notes Editor O'Brien had thoughtfully given each contributor's address.)

The letter could hardly have been less "carefully plotted." Being on time has ever been a fetish with me and I was already due for an important series of tests at my doctor's office. If I were late I should lose my appointment. So my introductory note was not only a slapdash affair, but I wondered as I wrote it just why it could not wait.

That night, feeling very foolish, I had the longing which comes to all of us at times to fly after a posted letter and retrieve it. Gretta Palmer's *God's Underground* was a best-seller that summer and I could only

hope that its author was in a location as unreachable!

The following morning, I was awakened by a brisk feminine voice. Gretta Palmer. Could I lunch with her at the Waldorf. No? Then could she lunch with me? And before I could stop myself, I had broken my doctor's orders to remain in bed and was saying, "Of course—in the Ritz Garden."

For the first time I sat throughout a luncheon hour in the Ritz Garden without once being aware of the music of the fountain; the always astonishing quack of fluffy, yellow ducks in mid-Manhattan; the riotously flowering plants and the chic gowns of New York's most fashionable women.

Gretta Palmer, a recent recruit to Rome, told me: "Not that one is transported to a state where human problems and conflicts are wiped out, but always and forever there is a substratum of rationality and purpose, a rock-bottom reality."

Luncheon finished, Gretta Palmer said in parting that when Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen, who had given her instructions in Catholicism, was in town, she would ask him to call on me; adding that when in New York he stopped just across the street at the Roosevelt Hotel.

I had wondered why I had chosen a nonair-conditioned hotel room in mid-Manhattan as a place to live that summer. Could it be because the nearness of our hotels made it possible for the Cicerone to my new adventure in Faith to leave her busy desk for a Kaffee-klatsch in my room when I was too ill to go out? And

that Monsignor Sheen would sometime be stopping at a hotel "just across the street"?

Was this another link in that "linkedness of circumstances"?

Or was it all to be part of that Providential functioning of God's grace which Dom Chapman describes:

"Our whole environment and everything that happens is God's Hand upon us . . . every detail of life is a means arranged by Him to Lead us to Himself."

Summer wore on. Humanly, my every heartbeat pulsed with longing for my Vermont home, with its high-ceilinged rooms, its wide verandas giving on Lake Champlain and the friendly, opalescent Adirondacks.

When our handy man sent flowers from my garden to "brighten-up" my hotel room, I opened them with a mingling of pleasure and sadness. With my own hands I had planted those flowers and knew where each could be expected to bloom with the changing seasons. At home, one of my daily rituals was to gather great basketfuls of blossoms early in the morning while the dew was still on them, and in a cool basement garden room I knew that aesthetic satisfaction (which belongs to every feminine woman) of choosing, assorting, cutting, snipping and arranging vases for special places all over the house.

When people complimented my penchant for arranging flowers, I felt a pride somewhat comparable, I think, to the way those fortunate women who are mothers must feel when taking a bow for their off-

spring. For I had not only arranged those flowers but put the seeds in the ground, and tended them lovingly.

In the late afternoon—that home-coming hour to which women have looked forward since time immemorial—I poignantly missed my husband. I would think, there in that New York hotel room, It's time now to take Jock and George (our setter and pointer) to meet their master. In my mind's eye, off we would go down that elm-shaded street, all three of us gay with excitement and anticipation, the dogs tugging playfully at my billowy skirts. (And what a change a pastel organdie or voile would be from my invalid-imposed nightgowns, and bed jackets which had become almost a uniform.)

Two things only made it possible, I believe, to hang on to my sanity during that long and torrid summer: the hope that highly specialized medical treatment would lead to full restoration of health; and a burgeoning interest in Catholicism.

Though my convert friend was most generous in sending or bringing armfuls of books which had helped her in her investigation, I found that in choosing books for this very personal pursuit, it is a case of "to each his own."

At the Cathedral branch of the New York Public Library, near the Ritz, I discovered a vast treasury of Catholic literature. I was permitted (thank you, Mr. Carnegie) to take out as many as ten books at a time and to keep them a month. Day in and out and far into the night the radio was silent, the daily newspapers went out folded as they had come in, magazines were

tossed aside. I read nothing but this one subject which opened illimitable vistas.

In the long history of Mother Church each age is starred with illustrious writers each with his own peculiar gift. The list is rich in scholarship, poetry, and inspired revelation—eloquent words repeated down the ages bringing illumination and solace to truth seekers of all times and faiths.

But it was the converts writing of their deeply moving (and it is always that) transition into the Church, which gave me the greatest pleasure and exerted the greatest influence. Starting in the fourth century with St. Augustine and ushering in the twentieth with those gifted Anglican divines—John Henry Newman, who became a cardinal; Robert Hugh Benson, son of an archbishop; and Monsignor Ronald Knox, steeped in Oxford's literary traditions. Continuing with Sigrid Undset, third woman ever to receive the Nobel Prize for literature; Jacques Maritain, Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University; Thomas Merton, who offered his youth and literary genius to serve God in a Trappist monastery. And later Clare Sheridan, noted sculptor and cousin of Winston Churchill; and Gene Fowler, author of *Good Night Sweet Prince*.

In my reading of the saints I came upon St. Francis de Sales. That great and holy spiritual director of the nobility tells us that in meditation we should gather a nosegay of devotion.

"Those," he writes, "who have been walking in a beautiful garden do not leave it willingly without

taking away with them . . . flowers, in order to inhale their perfume and carry them about during the day.”

So, though I could not gather bouquets from my garden in Vermont—from my summer’s wanderings in the vast gardens of Catholic literature, I made my “nosegay of devotion.” And I found it very sweet.

9

Shooin' Away the Bug-a-Boos

From ghouldies and ghosties
And long-legged beasties,
And things that go "Boom" in the night;
Good Lord deliver us!

Though I was sure Gretta Palmer, who lectured on Catholicism, knew her catechism and all the finer points of doctrine backward and forward, she maintained that a proper investigation of the teachings of the Church could be carried on only by instruction from a priest.

And that priest, naturally, should be none other than her own instructor, the great and famous Monsignor Sheen. We would await, she said, his arrival in New York. Eyeing my roomful of Catholic books, which having overrun the surface spaces were stacked on the floor and against the wall, she remarked facetiously, "Meanwhile, if you aren't very careful you'll read yourself into the Church!"

But not being a patient or temperate soul, that wasn't good enough for me. I made a mental reservation to carry on a lone-wolf reconnaissance.

I am sure an innovation in the sacrosanct atmosphere of the Ritz-Carlton was the brewing of one's own coffee, but I agree with the French that coffee must be

*Noir comme le diable,
Doux comme l'amour,
Chaud comme l'enfer!*

So every afternoon the battered but trusty old percolator which had accompanied me all over the world was put "on the boil." On one such occasion Gretta, in the midst of our conversation, picked up the telephone, made her connection and thrust the receiver into my hands: "Meet Mother Judge," she said, "a friend of mine."

Caught out, I was unprepared for any personal contact with what sounded suspiciously like a convent. Was my friend putting over a fast one? "Mother Judge!" I muttered, hand muffling the mouthpiece. "What kind of name is that for a nun—I thought they were all Marys and Theresas."

Then I was listening to a merrily brisk and friendly voice which shattered my apprehension that all nuns were mealy-mouthed. Mother Judge regretted that I was ill, but the rule of her Order prohibited her coming to see me. She said she would pray for me; would send me a couple of delightful new mysteries she had just finished; and when I was able would I come to see her.

Again I asked Gretta what kind of nun was this who read who-dunits and sounded so *normal*, and she re-

plied: "I can't explain Mother Judge to you, for she is unlike anyone you have ever met. She is most extraordinary. She is—well, she is Mother Judge."

Nevertheless, she was a nun, and nuns at that time practically headed my list of Catholic bug-a-boos. My sole contact with any of them had been when the house next door to ours in Vermont was sold and turned into what we called a "nunnery." This had occasioned grave alarm in our Protestant neighborhood lest this be the first omen that our restricted street was rapidly going "downhill."

My bedroom overlooked the convent and to my annoyance, I was awakened every morning at an unconscionable hour by a dilapidated car with screeching brakes which, according to my Catholic housekeeper, transported the "good sisters" to what she called, esoterically, "early Mass."

During a freeze, when the thermometer dropped to "30 below" (the norm for Vermont weather in mid-winter), I sometimes caught sight of two black-robed figures, icy wind whipping and billowing their voluminous habits as they waged battle—not against their adversary the Devil, but against the more formidable sleet and ice which blanketed their rooftop.

Our handy man expressed the sentiment of the neighborhood in his drawling vernacular when he allowed as how this was "men's work and not fittin' for ladies," adding, "Them nuns!" in a voice connoting ill-disguised contempt and warning that we should be prepared for almost anything.

To my shame, I must confess that every now and

again, especially at night, I peered through my windows hoping to catch a glimpse of strange goings-on. My curiosity went unrewarded, for all I ever saw was the "good sisters" going about their quite ordinary domestic chores of dusting and cleaning or preparing meals in their shining kitchen.

Nevertheless, whenever I went down to my garden I prayed fervently that I shouldn't run into any of them. And my Unitarian neighbor, who lived in the house on the other side, admitted to a quickening of her steps whenever she passed the "nunnery" at night.

And so it was greatly to my astonishment that I found myself the week following my introduction to Mother Judge preparing to accept her invitation to come to see her.

This was all the more extraordinary in view of the fact that my doctors had warned against my going out alone due to the steadily declining protein count which made it not unlikely that I should fall on my face. So any forays on my lone-wolf reconnaissance had to be cloaked in secrecy and undertaken at my own risk.

Furthermore, I discovered that *Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle*, the lengthy name of the convent to which Mother Judge was attached, was located at what seemed to me miles away—Riverside Drive and 140th Street.

Timorously, I rang the bell of the double doors of the old Schultz mansion, with its vine-covered porches giving on wide gardens and the fascinatingly busy life

of the Hudson. I don't know what I expected but certainly not what greeted me. Beyond the portress and just inside the door stood a nun clad in a black habit with the relief of a violet cape, a starched fluted ruff of crisp organdy (as flattering as a Lilly Daché creation).

Gray-blue eyes shone with serenity, happiness and a lively intelligence.

Mother Judge, with the hostess' instinct for hospitality had, herself, come to greet me. With a warm handclasp and with that same "normal" voice which had given me the courage for this expedition, she asked if I should like to take a "little look around." As we went, with my journalist's eye and ear alerted, I saw a religious community which was as different from my former fictional conception of a "nunnery," as two sides of a coin.

The New York convent known as St. Regis Cenacle had formed the nucleus of fifteen similarly flourishing communities in America, thirteen in this country and two in Canada. It all started, I learned, from three nuns who came as pioneers, on a summer day in 1894, from their Mother House in Southern France armed only with persevering faith and a couple of hundred dollars.

The foundation house was now expanded to several substantial buildings connected by covered passageways. Ascending by a modern elevator, we came to the Retreat House, called "Nazareth," each room bearing the name of a Saint. The large, airy rooms were attractively furnished for the comfort and conven-

ience of its occupants. Surreptitiously, I bounced on one of the beds and discovered the mattresses were neither straw nor haircloth but such as you might expect in a thoughtfully furnished guest room.

The Cenacle's chief claim to fame is that it is responsible for the retreat movement, now a popular and established institution of American religious life. Its name means literally "an upper room," a room set apart. In the Gospel it is this "upper room" in which Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist, and after the Ascension, the disciples with Mary returned to the Cenacle, waiting there nine days in prayer for His promised descent of the Holy Spirit. Thus was made the first "retreat" in Christian history.

The object of retreats, Mother Judge told me, is to come apart from the world, as Our Lord commanded, to a place of solitude and silence, where God can speak to the soul, giving strength and guidance and inspiration to carry on in the world.

"One of the reasons," she said, "so few people find God today is that they never take time to be alone. Most people are afraid of being alone and so are always escaping into activity and diversions. The retreat is one of the first steps toward finding God. For it is truly as St. Augustine said: 'I sought Thee and I found Thee not, because I sought Thee without. Again I sought Thee and found Thee, because I sought Thee in my own soul!'"

As we walked, Mother Judge told me that thousands of women, both Catholic and non-Catholic, come each year to St. Regis and to its branch houses

for many conveniently arranged and various kinds of retreats. Some come for a day of recollection and for private retreats, others for "closed retreats" which last from three to eight days.

Upon arrival, the retreatant is given a white veil that the head may be fittingly covered in the intimate and lovely Gothic chapel where many of the hours are passed—attending Mass or Benediction; praying before the Blessed Sacrament; going to Confession or listening to spiritual direction. Many of the Cenacle retreat masters have been among the most gifted members of the clergy. I was shown a bright and gleaming dormitory with refectory tables where the retreatants take their simple but appetizing meals in silence, listening to passages read by one of the nuns from Catholic classics of devotion. Available for counsel on worldly or spiritual problems are the retreat master, the sisters and the resident chaplain.

Walking along a lower floor, we passed the closed door behind which, since 1917, Maude Adams has made her home. I recalled an interview with Sir James Barrie in his famous chimney corner in London's Adelphi Terrace when he spoke of the luminous quality with which Miss Adams had "recreated the role of Peter Pan better than I myself created it."

Maude Adams was the only actress of our times to sustain the true glamor of a legendary figure by keeping her private life inviolable from public and press. A non-Catholic and panoplied with fame, in 1922 she galvanized the theatrical world and her worshipful public by retiring into the convent and making over

to the Cenacle her Long Island estate *Ronkonkoma*.

Meanwhile, I was discovering Mother Judge. She possesses that rare quality which not only makes you like her but which makes you quite certain that she likes you! With that courtesy which is a law of sanctity, she sensed my limited endurance and led me out to the gardens. On our way to a wisteria-shaded sun house, we passed a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, the marble figure which had come in 1918 in a camouflaged ship from the de Prato studios in Northern Italy. I was told that the day the Blessed Virgin was placed in the garden, some U.S. Navy battleships at anchor in the Hudson fired a 21-gun salute. This, said Mother Judge, with an air of mystery, has never been explained.

In May and September, months of special devotion to Mary, processions of children dressed in white and singing the Lourdes hymn, "Bring flowers of the rarest, bring flowers to the fairest," place their fragrant offerings at the feet of Our Lady and crown Her with a fleur-de-lis gold crown set in amethysts and diamonds collected by Mother Judge through the years. On the Feast of Corpus Christi, thousands of the clergy, religious and lay visitors go in candlelight procession through the gardens, the priest bearing the Blessed Sacrament. Thus is introduced a pageant of Old World solemnity in this quiet garden not too far from the heart of America's great and bustling metropolis.

I was very much liking this Cenacle with its waxed gleaming halls where "peace had spread her wings,"

and like Santayana living with his nuns in Rome, I could have wished to put down my typewriter and go to work in that sweet, calm atmosphere. But it was Mother Judge who most engaged my attention.

In 1914, Mary Judge, a girl of engaging attractiveness, daughter of a Boston Catholic family, was graduated from Boston University where she majored in languages and minored in English. With many worldly opportunities and social pleasures open to her, she answered a clear call to give her life to the service of God and man. Entering the Cenacle of St. Regis, she made her first vows two years later and after five more years, made her final vows. "At your first vows," as Mother Judge explains it, "you take the Order; at the final vows the Order takes you."

Her life is rich in service and in those more enduring riches of the interior life.

She is often in charge of retreats, instructs converts, prepares children for First Communion and takes part in The Divine Office sung daily by the Community. But in my own way, I was to discover that Mother Judge is "all things to all people." Though the Rule never permits her to leave the enclosure, she is as well known and as popular in New York say, as the late Alfred E. Smith. Many of the city's most prominent businessmen, some of them non-Catholics, are among her friends.

Though her vow includes poverty, and whatever is sent is shared with her sisters, she is the recipient of as many gifts as a perennial debutante. Books pour in, radios; a handsome television set was the gift of a

well-known non-Catholic publisher. When I asked what I might send as a delicacy to vary the convent's plain fare, the unpredictable Mother Judge said with the expectancy of a child: "I think we'd all enjoy very much as a special treat on a Feast Day some—crêpes Suzette."——*Crêpes Suzette!*

We spoke of mutual friends, of politics, of books (her conversation is liberally sprinkled with choice lines from the poets) and of name personalities in the Church, most of whom are personally known to her.

She couldn't have been nicer, she couldn't have been more gracious; but I was a little chagrined that not once had Mother Judge tried to inveigle me into the fold.

And I left her there, standing on the steps with a genuine "come again soon" on her smiling lips. And I smiled also, with thanksgiving and wry amusement that the busy, diminutive Mother Judge had served that day in still another capacity—that of "shoo-in" away the bug-a-boos."

Though I could not guess it then, she was to serve also in a far more vital encounter in the days ahead.

10

I Meet the Monsignor

ONE bright Sunday morning in early November a telegram announced that Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen would call on me within the hour.

My interviews abroad had familiarized me with protocol of court and Embassy. I had learned to curtsy acceptably before the crowned heads of Europe and even to conform to that strange un-American etiquette which demands that Royalty introduce its own conversational subjects. I knew that dictators insisted on being addressed as "Excellency." I had been properly coached before my audience with Pope Pius XI to genuflect, to kiss the Papal ring, to wear the long-sleeved, high-neck black gown and to cover my head with the conventional lace mantilla; but just how did one behave before a Monsignor?

I still felt as gauche and uncomfortable as if those thousands of interviews with celebrated personages had never taken place. Then my mind began to function as a journalist. Beyond any thought of self or superficiality, I concentrated on the celebrity I was to meet.

Though I had not met Monsignor Sheen, I had been hearing of him for twenty years. During this time, I had occasionally tuned in on his Sunday evening broadcast. But knowing his subject was Catholicism, I had done so only because his voice pleased me much in the same manner as symphonic music. Like all figures in the public eye, many legends and anecdotes had sprung about his name. These coupled with biographical facts pointed up a many-faceted personality and passed in preview before my mind.

In popular parlance, Monsignor Sheen is the name priest in America.

His irresistible persuasiveness with the spiritually lukewarm had been summed up in the colloquialism: "Sheen is believin'."

When it is announced that Monsignor Sheen will occupy the pulpit at St. Patrick's Cathedral a capacity congregation of some 9,000 souls packs the Fifth Avenue edifice to its great bronze doors, with a queue lined up for hours in any kind of weather.

On Good Friday, the overflow of several additional thousands is served by loud-speakers. For three hours, the heart of Manhattan's most congested midtown area becomes a miniature St. Peter's Square. The phenomenon is repeated for the evening service.

By members of all faiths, Monsignor Sheen is conceded to be the most electric orator of our times. So universal is the substance of his talks, that someone has said: "A bird can sip therein or an elephant can bathe."

For the masses he makes palatable the most pro-

found theological doctrines, and for the intellectually elite, he speaks from a classical scholarship which gained him the chair of philosophy at Catholic University in Washington and as many university degrees as leaves on a live oak.

The Sheen voice might well be (and is) the envy of actors of the contemporary theater. The appealing soft vowel sounds of his Celtic heritage are brought to perfected flexibility, each syllable polished and chiseled and served up on a golden platter. His voice is colored by smashing contrasts; from the force of a storm reverberating across mountaintops it falls effortlessly to the half-voice of plain chant with an increasing *pianissimo*.

He is acknowledged to be the greatest converter-priest of the century. The Sheen bait has been taken by many big fish of our unbelieving times. Due to our national trait of celebrity worship, much of his fame lies also in the fame of his converts.

Into his fold he has shepherded atheists, skeptics, and world-weary sophisticates; men and women of financial and social prestige; here and there he has plucked the flower of our intelligentsia. Among these: violinist Fritz Kreisler and his wife; the late columnist Heywood Broun; playwright, author, ex-Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce; globe-trotting author Greta Palmer; stage designer Jo Mielziner; Mrs. Irvin Cobb, widow of the great humorist, and their daughter "Buffy" who has inherited her father's gift; the late Grace Moore, opera star; Alice Whitney, socialite daughter of the Richard Whitneys; ex-

Communists Louis Budenz and Elizabeth Bentley; industrialist Henry Ford II; Colonel Horace A. Mann, educator, whose anti-Catholic propaganda contributed to the defeat of Presidential nominee Alfred E. Smith in 1928; and scores upon scores of others.

With so many notables in the full catch of this twentieth century fisher of souls, the charge of "Kings' Converter" has been brought against him. So numerous are the outstanding and cultured personages among his converts, that he has also been likened to those great confessors of the seventeenth century, Saint Francis de Sales and Archbishop Fénelon, whose social and intellectual gifts as well as their spirituality won many converts of the nobility.

However, his followers claim that no one soul has priority over his time or attention. Once when a prominent New York socialite had traveled to Washington for an instruction appointment, she was kept waiting an hour. The "Kings' Converter" had hastened to Washington's mean shanty district when a little Negro boy sent word he had suddenly made up his mind that he was ready to learn his catechism.

Besides his priestly duties of celebrating Mass daily and reading the Holy Office, it is well known that nothing is ever allowed to keep him from his daily hour of prayer and meditation.

Another anecdote from some forgotten source swung into my mind. A married couple, after hearing a Sheen broadcast for the first time, were not only converted to Catholicism but it was reported that the

husband decided to become a Trappist monk and the wife a contemplative nun.

The husband's explanation was:

"Something happened to my way of thinking when I heard Father Sheen. He is close to God. And the reason is that he spends so much time in meditation and prayer."

What manner of man was this I was about to meet?

Then automatically the skeptical reporter in me began to take over. Turning away from what seemed to be a profile of overstatement, I determined to be objectively realistic in forming my own impressions of this fabulous Fulton J. Sheen. . . .

In my room at the Ritz, the clock on the wall reached its hands over its head touching the noon hour. Briefly, my mind remarked and dramatized it. Could this be of special significance? Hopeful again, I asked myself: "Might this coming interview lead perhaps to the High Noon of my unresolved Search?"

But that would mean becoming a Roman Catholic. And though I had been drawn to certain aspects of the Church, I was still as far as ever separated from what I thought of as the Catholic mentality. So often had I heard it that I think I honestly believed that every Roman Catholic was committed to the proselytizing of every Protestant who came within earshot.

This was indeed putting myself in the lion's jaws!

I could see that the coming interview was going to be an ordeal. To make matters worse, the Monsignor was late. The clock swung to the half-hour.

All my inherited prejudices arose to gird me with sales-resistance. For, of course, he would begin expounding Catholic dogmas. With mounting opposition, I checked them over: Hell; Purgatory; Transubstantiation; the Blessed Virgin—and I had only come to the veneration of saints when I noticed that another half-hour had passed.

I was getting restless. "The sanctification of the now moment" was what I had been told was the Monsignor's way of operating. Indeed! Well, I was a journalist whose training had conditioned me to operating on a split-second moment and if there is anything I mortally despise it is being kept waiting.

Interrupting my turbulent thoughts came a gentle tap on the door. I opened it. A friendly smile, a warm palm-to-palm handclasp, and I was looking into eyes as luminously blue as though lit from the sunlight of Heavenly spheres.

Refusing my hostess' gesture of assistance, he briskly deposited his smart double-breasted topcoat, Italian white silk scarf and black Homburg. With an empathy which at once marked a thoughtful courtesy, he saw that I was comfortably settled and, with clinical exactitude, inquired about the rare hypoproteinemia.

He turned to cross the room and chose a straight-back chair. My reportorial eye automatically registered his appearance. Of medium height, he is hound-slim and elastically muscled and in all his movements I was reminded of a Gauguin's fluid grace.

Though extremely personable, I realized to my im-

mense relief that Monsignor Sheen is not the Adonis type so rapturously described by some of his disciples. His complexion is weathered; the lips full and mobile; the dark hair combed cleanly back with only a touch of gray at sensitive temples to give the slightest hint that, on May eighth, he would celebrate his fifty-fifth birthday. This youthfulness is accentuated in profile, for the Celtic nose is then seen to be disarmingly retroussé.

He apologized for keeping me waiting.

Knowing that he often goes for days with snatched glasses of milk, I asked if he would have lunch. Coffee? Sherry? Or perhaps Monsignor would like to smoke? But he refused all offers of hospitality. He neither drinks nor smokes, himself, but thinks both indulgences in moderation can be "offered to the glory of God."

He creates an atmosphere of *en rapport* and its resultant relaxation. Hence all the trepidation I had felt at being in the unfamiliar presence of a high Catholic dignitary had vanished.

Many demands crowded the Sunday afternoons of his weekly visits to New York. His convert class to be instructed; private interviews with potential converts; a lecture in a suburban parish; people waiting at his hotel to pounce upon him; his early evening broadcast—not to mention emergency applications of the "now moment."

Despite all this, he has that priceless gift of making you feel he is wholly yours. Such is his undiverted concentration to the job at hand that I told him he fitted

Galileo's comment about the sun: "The sun which has all those planets revolving around it and depending on it, can ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else in the world to do."

Then I saw part of the technique he employs in setting people at ease, whether in private conversation or from the lecture platform—the famous Sheen sense of humor.

"Oh, one daren't be smug about that business of concentration," he said. And it reminded him of a story he tells sometimes in the pulpit. "Two priests were traveling on horseback in Ireland. One boasted he was able to pray with concentration. Whereupon his companion bet him his horse he couldn't even get through the Lord's Prayer without distraction. The other priest took the bet, dismounted, and kneeling beside the road, began the 'Our Father.' He had come only to 'Give us this day' when he looked up and asked his companion, 'Does that bet include the saddle?'"

Then like a flash, my caller was the deeply serious Monsignor. For he is no dilettante when dealing with the deeply serious stuff of an individual's spiritual problems.

I noticed an arresting quality about his face which was more than its bony structure forming interesting planes and angles. It was a face of dramatic contrasts, changing with his moods and subjects. Even now in repose, the almost boyish youthfulness with which he had greeted me had fled. There was the gaunt asceticism of a St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the eyes so deeply

dark and socketed that I could understand why he had been described as black-a-vised.

It was clear that he was concerned only with how he could apply the "now moment" to the present situation, in other words, to me. Monsignor Sheen has the psychic gift of penetration which enables him to see clear through the veil of the flesh to the deepest mysteries of the soul.

So I found myself telling him—or rather indicating by a few words—my lifelong search for Truth.

He took it from there on out.

Instead of making me feel self-conscious, he made me feel that the longing for eternal values was the only thing that really mattered. That the human soul, *my* soul, was very precious; that he cared and cared enormously. That helping me—not Susie Smith or the unbelieving world in general—but me, Gladys Baker, was at once his greatest joy and service.

"Your questing for spiritual certainties," he said, "is not entirely unique. Pascal claimed there are only two kinds of reasonable persons—those who love God with all their hearts because they have found Him and those who search for Him with all their hearts because they have not found Him.

"Modern man is going to God through his disordered, frustrated, complicated, bewildered self. And from fears which create intolerable tensions.

"We live in an atmosphere of impending disaster. People everywhere imagine the destruction of the world—and most of all themselves!—by the unleashing of the Hydrogen bomb. They feel as apprehensive

as if God, as a night watchman, is about to come down from Heaven, rattling His keys and saying: 'Gentlemen, it is closing time!'

His gestures are fluidic, as eloquent as *Pisarro's* sunlight. He uses two so peculiarly his own that one feels they are those to which he has grown accustomed in his sacramental ministrations. His arm makes the graceful, sweeping motion of benediction and when a precious truth of his belief is being handled, the thumb and forefinger close in the protective circle used by the priest in handling the Host.

"We all come into the world," he said, "with three innate drives which are paramount in all of us. We want Truth—answers to the why and wherefore of existence; we want Life and Love. Do you honestly believe the Creator would have played such a shabby trick on you of implanting these perfectly natural desires if they were never to be satisfied?"

"But another thing. It is flagrantly and empirically true that these longings can never be humanly achieved to our complete satisfaction. For one comes to see that these attributes are those of God and that the only way to perfect fulfillment of any of them is through what the mystics call 'Union with God.'"

His words fell quietly, unaffectedly, like clear sparkling gems into the pool of tranquillity which surrounds him. He was not the great orator-converter, Monsignor Sheen—Domestic Prelate to His Holiness, but Father Sheen, the simple parish priest.

Without intending to do so, I told him about my repetitious dream and the mystical experience.

He looked at me as if he were seeing me for the first time. "Such experiences," he said, "are rare, especially for people who have lived and worked actively, as you have, in the world."

Then, unequivocally, he confirmed the interpretation I had stumbingly arrived at following my brush with death in Vermont.

"They indicate a home-longing for Heaven and nothing else but God will satisfy you. For He is the home of the soul. Though it is not as insistent and obvious in everyone, the same need is actually pressing and universal. For we are all kings in exile, miserable without the Infinite. As St. Augustine, that great fourth century convert who had known years of pagan living and discontent, said, 'Thou hast made us for Thyself alone and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.'"

His mind is rich with the treasures of learning and letters. For analogy he turns handily to the realms of music, poetry and art. He had risen and was standing before an abstract painting.

"We do not always understand the thought God had in mind in creating different souls any more than you or I understand the thought of the artist who created that painting. Certainly *I* don't!"

Then he whirled, and holding my gaze steadily, said: "But this I can tell you. That knocking at the gate of infinity within you has great significance and can be of great value to you."

I told him so far it had done nothing but plunge me into desolation even at times when I was, from a

worldly point of view, at the high point of happiness or achievement.

I also said that while my pilgrimage had brought me now and again within sight of the beckoning lights and hearth fires, I was still a spiritual vagabond. That I was tired . . . "even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to the sea."

His eyes mirrored compassionate understanding. "Hilaire Belloc had a similar longing, and expressed it similarly: 'Within that household the human spirit has roof and hearth. Outside it, is the night.'"

I wanted to cry out to him the age-old question: "What then does one do to be saved?" But prejudices, also age-old, held my tongue—made me silent.

Now Monsignor was on the move, as he often is when a subject engages his passionate interest, but he paused and said something I was never to forget:

"You do realize, of course, that one cannot go on searching forever? For we seek ultimately to find. Even the word 'search' implies eventual fulfillment. When you have discovered the goal of life, you will not waste your energies trying to discover it. Instead, you will plunge into the joys of a voyager who turns again home."

He glanced at his watch. "I fear I have tired you. If you let me come to see you again, I must not stay so long."

I knew he was leaving and yet at no time had the so-called avid proselytizer used the slightest pressure to engage my interest in joining his church, nor had he mentioned those *bête-noires* of Catholic doctrine.

He asked if I should like him to give me his blessing. Mutely, I expressed my gratitude. The strong suppliant hands touched my head gently and I felt the grace they had received pour out again, as he intoned the age-old benediction: "May the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost descend upon thee and remain with thee always."

At the door, he turned with the whispered phrase which is the famous Sheen signature to any private or public communication: "God love you."

I wanted to run after him like a little child, put my hand in his, and ask him to lead me into that Church where he had found the sweetness of God and the beauty of His House. Impulsively I ran toward the door, only to hear the clang of the elevator.

That most tangible of intangibilities—the radiance created by a spiritual personality—permeated the room and lingered for hours.

I flung myself down in a chair by the window, oblivious of the roar of the Madison Avenue traffic. The ticking of time had stopped.

Here was a man more fully spirit-embodied than any I had met. Here it seemed to me was the beauty of holiness incarnate. He was like a clear transparency for God to shine through without any cloudy physical obstructions. I felt he spoke to me as God would speak.

In him, the process of sanctification has created a capacity into which the grace of God flows and pours forth again into a largess of benediction. One feels,

however, that this self-denial has not been won without stormy conflicts and dear-bought conquests. For, make no mistake about it, Fulton Sheen is no sanctimonious Milquetoast, but a man of dynamic passions and warm human emotions. Indeed it is the sublimation of these which have made him a more potent instrument to serve God and man.

Here was no ivory-tower mystic. His faith was no summons from life. His mission was among men to reveal to them the joy of knowing eternal life in the midst of mortal life and human affairs, and the experientiability of God here and now.

Was not that exactly what I was after?

11

I Leave the Monsignor

INSTEAD of guarding the tiny seed and allowing it to reach toward the sunlight of God's grace, so impressed was I with my meeting with Monsignor Sheen that I told some of my closest friends.

It had always impressed me as a benighted social consciousness which at the mention of Catholicism caused a slight shrug of the shoulder, the patronizing lift of the eyebrow, the hushed tone of anathema.

But I had thought this surely did not include *my* friends. They fell more or less into three classes: intellectuals who called themselves liberals and who stood for tolerance; creative artists, warm and congenial, whom I thought indifferent to an individual's religious opinion; seekers of Truth, who, I felt, could be counted on to rejoice in any investigation which promised my Home-coming after a long and travel-stained journey.

But my expectancy of finding understanding proved to be the height of naïveté and wishful thinking. One by one my most intimate friends failed me.

Though it was known and cheered that I was writ-

ing a book on my exhaustive examination of various faiths, cults and philosophies, the mere mention that I was investigating Catholicism was treated with witch-burning hostility. I knew the meaning of that phrase—used so often in convert literature—“division from friends.” Heartbreakingly it seemed clear that those closest to me would be forever beyond my reach.

The truths of Catholicism, at this stage, were carried in a very fragile vessel, my convictions held with gossamer threads. So I made excuses to avoid those friends for whom I cared most, for I shrank from the harsh and destructive arguments. But I was desperately lonely.

Because it was known that my Search had carried me into many unorthodox paths, it had been at times variously reported that I had “taken up” Christian Science, Theosophy, Spiritualism, Buchmanism, Vedanta, Unity, Buddhism. That was “interesting,” “amusing,” and gave one an extra touch of “glamour.” But even a glance in the direction of the Mother Church of all Christian religions placed one quite definitely beyond the pale.

One day answers came from two friends to whom I had written enthusiastic letters about the privilege of meeting Monsignor Sheen, and on whom I had counted for support. One, a sensitive and talented poet and a professor of English at a leading university, wrote mockingly:

What is this about joining the Papist fold? They’ve tried to work on me but I tell them I don’t need any-

one to speak for me. I'll do it myself. Their argument is, of course, that the Church offers the calm refuge of a great historic institution, serene through all the ages, certain and secure amid a confused and harassed world. I believe *courage* is the greatest word in the English language, it brings its own reward without leaning on others.

That one sailed right over my head. What in Heaven's name did courage have to do with it? Could courage be a substitute for man's dependence on God?

The other was a letter from a mature woman who throughout my life had been a spiritual mother to me. Cultured, brilliant, she was recognized as one of the few authentic mystics of our times. She plead her point with the utmost tact and gentleness and I knew her counsel had come out of long hours of meditation in my behalf. But her words cut deep.

While there are very many brilliant and intellectual Catholics in this and in the old world, some of them "birthright" Catholics, some of them converts, yet perhaps the main body is composed of those who do not find it difficult to follow the teachings of their Church and priest. They have been conditioned to this. But about you, I pause to wonder.

Ever since I have known you, you have considered and written of divergent ideas, balanced one set of convictions against another, and your companions in the social and literary world have been men and women conspicuous for moral and intellectual courage along many lines. . . . It was these people you

knew, interviewed, described in print. Your field was as wide as the world.

Having mentally wandered over so vast an area, shall you be able to conform to a strictly formulated set of doctrines? What is going to still your questioning when you are confronted with this or that statement which immediately arouses your instinct of finding the Truth for yourself by patiently questing through the Inner Way?

It is easy to take a step, not so easy to retreat.

I believe Monsignor Sheen is most probably the ablest one of the Catholic clergy in the United States at the present time and I am sure he has been responsible for many Protestants passing into the Church he represents. Attracted as you are by Catholicism, I can not help but feel if you see him, he will be the instrument of your passing into his fold.

Would you care to divest yourself temporarily of Catholic contacts and go along on your own way as long as you feel moved to or until it is clear in your mind what is best for *you*?

This was very different. Throughout my life, not unmarred by crises, it was this friend to whom I always turned. Her advice, given from the practicality of the best type of mystical mind, had guided me unerringly.

I tried to put her letter out of my mind, but day and night her words came back to me. This letter plus the loss of my other friends proved too much for my still tentative hold on Catholicism.

And so almost beyond my will I found myself one midnight writing a letter:

Dear Monsignor Sheen:

It was most gracious of you to offer to come to see me again. Thank you very much for your kind interest and may I say it was indeed a rare privilege meeting you.

However, I feel I should tell you that I have reached the conclusion that I am too Protestant-conditioned ever to accept the doctrines of the Catholic Church.

The more I delve into these teachings which are so essentially alien to my love of all Truth the more I am convinced of Gandhi's conclusion, reached also after long study and experience:

"All religions are true. All religions have some error in them. All religions are almost as dear to me as my own . . . my veneration of other faiths is the same as for my own faith. Consequently the thought of conversion is impossible. Our prayers for others ought never to be: God! give them the light Thou hast given to me, but, give them all the light and truth they need for their highest development."

(Like many moderns I still valued tolerance more highly than Truth. I should never have fallen into this error of logic in any other field; if someone had asked me to believe that water was H_2O to him but might be H_3O to me or HO_2 to someone else and that all of us were equally correct, I should have seen the mistake at once. It is only in the religious field that we can be taken in. But, as yet, I had no infallible standard of Truth.)

So I closed my letter to Monsignor Sheen and sent it, thinking: It is finished.

12

"Not Knowing How to Run"

The centipede was happy, until a
frog in fun
Said, which leg, please, comes after
which?
This raised her doubts to such a
pitch,
She fell confounded in the ditch
Not knowing how to run.

A silence which was almost vocal followed the dispatching of my letter. This was empirical refutation of the devouring proselytism attributed to Roman Catholics. But it was as though a cloud had been dropped by my own hand shutting off the faint gleam of light.

During the following weeks (it was December now) this darkness deepened. Spiritually I was in a "worse state than the first," for having once glimpsed the supernatural reality of the Catholic faith any other form of orthodox Christianity seemed unreal to me.

But I tried.

"Should you care to divest yourself of all Catholic contacts," my oldest and most esteemed friend had proposed, and I had done so. Under our "gentlemen's agreement" that had meant also putting aside all Catholic reading.

This lead me to a nearby bookshop handling Protestant literature and carefully censored Roman Catholic classics.

Among these was *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. As I stood leafing through it a young saleswoman came up, cocked a disapproving eyebrow and said, "You're not by any chance getting Roman fever?" It was the first time I had heard the phrase which I was to learn is uttered with the same horror as if you were exposing yourself to a contagious disease.

"If you read Paul Blanshard's book I'm sure you'll recover," she said.

So I took it along.

American Freedom and Catholic Power was such obvious anti-Catholic propaganda that under its university cap and gown I thought I recognized a familiar figure—a Deep South evangelist shouting the same old tirades against the "Scarlet Woman of Babylon."

Moreover, the book seemed flagrantly aimed at that sensation-seeking element of the reading public who upon sighting an anti-Catholic title on a book jacket hopes it has come upon another *Maria Monk*, with scurrilous tales of babies stashed in convent walls and the carryings-on of nuns and priests. Nowhere in Blanshard's attack on a religion honored by

millions of the world's devout men and women could I discover that he had any substitute faith to offer.

As for me, I told the bookstore clerk on my second visit that my need could not be fed on negativism and violence. I was looking for a living, affirmative faith. I said that in order to cure my "Roman fever" she would have to produce something better than Blanshard.

She smiled creamily and said she could do just that. Then she revealed what looked as though she had been up to a bit of proselytizing on her own. She had spoken to her Anglican minister and he would be over to see me that very afternoon.

This, then, was Anglo-Catholicism, that exclusive branch of the Episcopal communion which ordinary members, like me, referred to as "High Church." Its worship was in some points so similar to that of the Roman Mass that some members of the latter faith had confessed to sitting through its service without being aware that they had gotten into the "wrong pew."

While reviving some of the ritualism and conventional life of Catholicism, the Anglicans denied the authority of Rome and Rome, in turn, denied the validity of Anglican Holy Orders.

I reminded myself that there were so few Anglo-Catholic churches in America, that unless one lived in a large city there would still remain for me the primary need of an accessible place in which to worship. On the other hand I did not know a great deal about

Anglo-Catholicism and in my state of aridity I hoped the High Churchman might reveal certain advantages of Anglo-Catholicism over Roman Catholicism. And that he, who also called himself priest and father, might prove to be as inspiring as that other priest I had come to know so fleetingly. . . .

I have always maintained that the most welcome words in the English language are "Let's make a long story short." I was beginning to think I should have to apply this to my caller that afternoon, for that good man of the cloth ignored the doctor's sign on my door:

VISITORS, ONE A DAY, FOR ONE HOUR ONLY.

He remained for four solid hours. (I use the adjective advisedly.) He did not present me with any of the beauty of holiness which I knew was bountifully to be had in his church and, knowing my physical condition prohibited church attendance, he did not offer to bring me Holy Communion. His talk was confined to abusive criticism ranged against the Roman church.

The results of my visit with this priest was a state of spiritual and physical exhaustion and a dozen books which were to save me from my "perilous fate."

All the volumes were one-sided treatises upholding the Reformation. Earlier that summer I had come to grips with this important subject by reading neutral historians, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. So my logical and unavoidable conclusion was that these books "did protest too much."

On the subject of the Reformation I am no more

willing to embark than on any other disputatious theological profundity. Like Monsignor Ronald Knox, if any specialist feels inclined to buttonhole me here and there for fuller explanations, I must offer him the "discourtesy of hurrying on." However, to those interested in an unbiased report on the sixteenth century schism in the Christian church I can suggest in the words of the late Al Smith that they "look at the record."

The books, like the visit, left me empty. A few days later a letter came from the divine. He wrote, this man of the cloth, that while Catholic churches were filled, the turnover at their many services was as automatic as a slot-machine. And that its communicants attended Mass to receive the Holy Eucharist in the same casual manner that they went to their hairdresser or barber.

In today's jargon, that really "tore it."

Again I felt like a bit of ivy that had been storm-swept from its moorings.

I knew now why many potential converts to Catholicism having looked once in the direction of Rome and, for one reason or another having looked away, were left literally facing agnosticism.

But that was not for me. Faith was more vital to my existence than the very air I breathed.

I had to know.

I was almost tempted to take another whirl at the cults when there occurred a series of strange coinci-

dences—or were they what Huxley calls, "especially devised occasions for spiritual advance"?

Some of my closest friends, not having their needs fulfilled in orthodox churches, had devoted years of intellectual and spiritual allegiance to various cults. Though I had not heard from some of them since my investigation of Catholicism, during the following weeks they swung, one by one, back into my orbit; and I was to have first-hand reports on how these dedicated followers of America's most flourishing cults were doing.

A friend in New Thought who had been brought up in Boston's Back Bay religious and social conventions, had moved to Miami—that Utopia of the cultists. Though professing her enthusiasm for her new faith which gave her "everything," her letters hinted at an increasing melancholia. Earlier that summer an S.O.S. revealed that this had developed into a desperate depression. At that time my Catholic investigation was going strong and so I suggested that she talk with a Catholic priest. Her reply was a violent denunciation of what she believed to be the teachings of the "Papists," adding, "I'd rather die first."

And she almost did!

A mutual friend brought news that with an overdose of sleeping pills the New Thought disciple had attempted to take her own life. Her "practitioner," one of those piety-camouflaged gigolos who prey on wealthy middle-aged women who belong to the Legion of Lonely Hearts, had encouraged a romantic

attachment only to drop her at the first sign of genuine illness.

It seemed to me that our sensitive and idealistic friend could only have come to such a sorry pass by *not* taking thought—either new or old.

Another, a fallen-away Catholic who had been a high-powered fashion executive, asked if she might call on me. I had not seen her for several years. Tall and beautiful, she had always been exquisitely groomed—the kind of woman who caused admiring glances to follow her everywhere.

She came into my room wearing a strange burnoose-like garment, and without pausing to greet me, took her position cross-legged on the floor and began chanting a salutation in Sanskrit.

She went through some weird gyrations which involved thrusting out her head in angular motions in the not very attractive manner of a snake. When I suggested that she stop being Ramakrishna and be herself she said I was insulting her religion. And didn't I know she had gone into Vedanta? Then it came out that she now passed most of her time in a one-room West Side "Ashram" with a handful of Orientals meditating before a picture of the Hindu Christ. She assured me that this was "*it*." That she had found complete happiness, contentment and spiritual delight.

But Rosabelle, her Negro maid, whose services I sometimes shared, told a different story. Rosabelle

begged me: "Please, ma'am, stop her from that crazy chantin' stuff and having her apartment filled with nobody but Hindoos. She done gone almos' plum out of her haid. Times, she doan even hairs me speakin' to her. And nights she gits into such a mess of histairics dat de neighbors done spoke about it."

Happiness? Contentment? Spiritual delight?

What a narrow escape I had had. This was one of the Eastern cults that had appealed to me through the writings of its literary followers, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Gerald Heard and others.

Next came my sculptor friend from Mississippi. She had been an ardent Christian Scientist. When I had seen her a few years ago, she radiated an air of young innocence. To gain recognition, experts said she needed only a sufficient number of her striking figures to give a one-man show.

She had put on a one-man show all right, but not in the way the experts intended.

I was shocked at what the years had done to her. The bright youth was tarnished. Her hammer and chisel had been put aside.

Gradually it all came out. She was having an affair with a married man twice her age. This she called *real* self-expression.

And how did it co-ordinate with her belief in Christian Science? (In all fairness I recalled Mrs. Eddy's statement that "the cornerstone of Christian Science is purity.")

"There is," my friend had figured out, "an individual interpretation to be made of the Leader's teaching, applying it to the demands of modern life."

And had she found happiness?

Well, of course, his wife was one of those dogma-bound Catholics who refused to give him a divorce, and to be sure it was a hole and corner existence—people gossiped so in a small town, and she had been ostracized by her old friends. And she did seem to be doing a lot of secret drinking these days and somehow the inspiration to model never came any more. And she couldn't deny there were times of anxiety and a good deal of her money had gone for frequent long-distance telephone calls to a "practitioner" in a distant city for absent treatment and . . .

What was the matter, I wondered. Could it be that she was not holding the right thought?

And another—the gifted concert pianist and composer.

When I had last heard of her she was making a world concert tour. Since then she had become absorbed in occultism and joined the Arcane School. She had devoted years to the "revelations" of Mrs. Alice Bailey, said to have come straight from an "ascended Master." I knew that the Arcane course involved so much time and energy that I had turned that one down from sheer physical inertia, I suppose. I knew also that for years my friend had had no social life. She retired by 8 P.M. in order to awaken at 5 A.M. to

study and report on the books published by the School which were "must" reading.

She had had to abandon her brilliant career and had been forced into that groove of nonexpression, stifling to the creative artist—teaching piano.

Then one day came her S.O.S. Her leader had passed away and she feared the school might automatically be dissolved.

"But there stands Mother Church throughout the ages," I said impulsively. Had I read that somewhere or had it grown in my subconscious from that seed which I had thought was winter-killed?

Then a letter from a friend in Georgia. She had been my mother's roommate at college. One of the most charming, gay and humanly attractive persons I had known. Some years ago she had lost her only daughter by a sudden attack of polio. After that she had spent most of her time seeking spiritualistic solace from mediums both here and abroad. Though she professed her faith in the cult of her choice it did not prevent her from turning in on herself, abandoning her career as a novelist and shutting herself away from all human companionship. This, plus corrosion of grief and the dark mediumistic practices, took its toll of her health. She had developed a persecution complex. And a few self-pitying lines of her letter were the only testimonial of her faith:

The separation between the sick and the well is so important that I wonder why it has not been recog-

nized. I can see this and the difference is greater than any unlikeness. National, racial, sexual distinctions are nothing in comparison. Here is complete lack of understanding of the sick by the well.

It is real, total isolation and when the sickness is chronic or hopeless then the world inside the ring of others shrinks to a point where love itself seems a stranger. But still it would be welcome in this otherwise solitary confinement.

Poor darling! Had her "spirit" communications caused her to lose communication with The Spirit and to be guilty of that despair which Dante has proscribed "to be sad in the sweet air which rejoiceth in the sun"?

To be sure one must never judge any religion or group by individual members, whether clergy or laity. And I am convinced that many sincere followers of all these sects are journeying toward Heaven; also, that there are, and have been, godly souls in every religion down through the ages. For I could not believe that the loving Creator would withhold His grace from any creature who earnestly sought Him and conscientiously employed the best means at his disposal for coming into union with Him.

But it is also true that "by their fruits ye shall know them," and the fruits which had been presented to me during that interval of indecision happened to be of a slightly fly-blown variety.

Consequently, I felt very much like that centipede whose

Doubts were raised to such
a pitch
She fell confounded in a ditch
Not knowing how to run.

The joyous season approached. But there was no lifting of my spirit to greet the great festival of the believing Christian world. For I was not of that world.

For all my lifelong search, my spiritual stores were never more depleted.

Frequently now:

I was isolated in a cold blue void where neither light nor warmth could ever reach me.

Christmas in New England is celebrated with traditional ritual and is a home-gathering of families. And so I had insisted that my husband, as head of our numerous relations, remain in Vermont for this yearly reunion.

I knew also that to find my way out of the stark emptiness which engulfed me would require the gathering of all my strength in interior silence.

One phone call came that Christmas Eve. It was Mother Judge, her voice serene and cheerful, wishing me the joy of the season. She had heard of my "dismissal" of Monsignor Sheen and had respected my resolution to remain aloof from all Catholic contacts. She was phoning now to say: "Whether you ever come into the Church or not I shall always love you and pray for you."

Midnight! I turned the dial of my radio, thinking

to tune in on some Christmas carols. My room was dark and I had not bothered to select any particular station. Suddenly I heard a voice, warm and vital. No one could mistake that voice. It had spoken recently in my own room. Now in a Christmas sermon, it pled passionately, convincingly, for belief in the Infant born in Bethlehem to save man from himself and to give life abundant, now and forever, to every human heart who would accept Him.

When the florist shop opened Christmas morning I ordered American Beauty roses to be sent across the street to Monsignor Sheen.

13

Monsignor Back on the Job

NEW YORK's January twilight scooped up the remaining daylight as the wall clock in my hotel room scooped up the remaining minutes until six o'clock—the time set for my second meeting with Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen.

His response to my roses was a phone call from his secretary on Christmas day to ask whether I should like to see Monsignor the following Saturday afternoon. Otherwise for more than a month I had had no word from him—directly or indirectly. Nor had I expected any. Certainly my impulsive, peremptory letter had been no Machiavellian model of diplomacy but a curt dismissal of one of the most sought-after figures in American public life. Such an act in ordinary social intercourse would have constituted a flagrant breach of etiquette and written *finis* to any further relationship.

What had been Monsignor's reaction?

To refuse his kind offer of paying me priestly sick calls would surely have offended his more than ordi-

nary good taste and courtesy and placed him in the unaccustomed position of being *persona non grata*.

My dread of the impending encounter was in no wise lessened by recalling certain of his reported characteristics. Rumor had it that this amiable Monsignor was not always so amiable.

In matters concerning the Faith he was a stern disciplinarian. And, when occasion called forth his righteous indignation, the Irish temper was said to show signs of definite levitation (and not always in the saintly tradition!). At such times it was said that the celebrated "tongue of angels" was transformed into a whiplash against compromise and error.

It took no flights of fancy to sense that Monsignor Sheen, as a mature and integrated personality, was not likely to suffer fools gladly—and certainly I had been very foolish.

Moreover, during the past weeks since I had seen him my physical condition had declined sharply, the protein levels having taken a nose dive. The night before, the doctor and nurse had departed at midnight after administering an emergency transfusion. Result—I had experienced my first plasma reaction, a convulsive chill lasting until morning.

Though this had vanished, the thought of the swiftly approaching appointment resulted in something suspiciously resembling the same symptom. At least figuratively my teeth were chattering.

Feeling my embarrassment would be less evident in the twilight's half-shadow, I switched on only the

small bedside light. I plumped the pillows behind me. If I could not "meet the enemy standing," at least a semiupright position might make me feel less worm-like when Monsignor arrived.

Then came the gentle tap and before I knew it he was standing beside me. He held my hand for a moment and looked steadily at me with the vision in his eyes. Under his warm smile the clutch of ice began to thaw.

He had brought some books. Opening them I saw they were thoughtfully and personally inscribed in his Spencerian-like handwriting.

He took the chair beside the table and, as though no interval had elapsed since our last conversation, he inquired about the progress in my medical treatment. He said he had remembered me daily in his Mass, asking that my strength and joy might be renewed.

I rather wished that I might drop dead. Surely here were roses for ashes.

But I faced up to it. Directly I asked him what he had thought of my letter.

"Oh, that wasn't you. I knew I would hear from you again."

"How could you know?"

Then, as often is his habit, his answer to my question came as a story. He said it had happened only that morning on the plane coming up from Washington.

The seat next to him was unoccupied. The hostess was a pretty young thing but there was something

hard about her speech and mannerisms. When they were well under way, she came up and asked if she might sit beside him.

"You're Father Sheen, aren't you?" she had asked as an introductory question. "Well, I'm a Catholic but I never found any one yet who could answer my difficulties about the Church, and I'm sure you could."

"Before you tell me any more," he had said to her, "I will tell you your difficulty. It is moral, not intellectual. You are in love with a married pilot and you can't understand why the Church doesn't break Our Lord's word condemning divorce."

Astonished, she admitted that was the situation.

Continuing, the Monsignor said to me, "After we'd talked an hour she was no longer on the defensive. The hardness was gone, and I knew she would give up her pilot and return to practicing her Faith, just as I knew about you."

Here was a man who literally read hearts. I asked him how he did it.

"I honestly don't know," he replied. "It comes to me out of the blue. This is especially true when I'm dealing with potential converts. I can always tell whether or not they are sincere. Sometimes it's by the questions they ask. One of my instruction classes was made up entirely of socialites (though I prefer an assortment), whom I suspected of coming out of curiosity. One by one they gave themselves away.

"One of the men, a broker, said to me: 'This is good stuff but wouldn't it mean I'd have to give up being an usher at St. Bartholomew's? And that's a good

contact for Wall Street customers.' He had joined my class because he hoped it might also prove advantageous.

"Another told me he was sold on the Catholic idea but what on earth would his class at Yale think? 'Besides,' he added, 'my wife won't give me a divorce.' He didn't have to say any more. I knew then, and later it was confirmed, that he was keeping a mistress.

"One of the women remarked: 'The Church has always drawn me and I know I should come in, but isn't there some way round that birth control business?' She was a rich, spoiled woman, too selfish to be bothered with children.

"So you see they were not really seeking the Truth, but some palliative to rid them of their sense of guilt and allow them to continue in their sins. So after two meetings I gave them up. I refuse to waste my time."

I asked the great converter-priest what he had found to be the most common stumbling blocks to conversion.

"There are actually no obstacles—only those inherent in the individual. How could there be real obstacles to entering a Church which is a Divine Instrument founded by Christ in order that man may gain eternal union with God?

"However, there are individuals who have many prejudices built up by misrepresentation of the Faith. Generally these are accentuated by something in their personal lives which they aren't willing to abandon. Then I get what I call the belligerent approach."

I knew that in this visit he would not go into any

disputatious points of doctrine since they probably came up only when one was under instruction. But his reference to belligerency made me speak of the witch-burning hostility I had encountered from some of my closest Protestant friends when I had mentioned my interest in Catholicism. And I pointed out that I had grown up to believe that the intolerance was all on the other side.

"Is it common practice for Catholics to denounce Protestantism, Monsignor?"

He was striding up and down, the doctor of theology defending an injustice against the Faith. He paused and pointed his professorial forefinger:

"I'll bet you something," he said. "You'll never hear of my mentioning Protestantism during any of my instruction."

"But why is that?"

"Well, since you aren't under instruction, I'll tell you!" He smiled slightly in appreciation of his own paradoxicalism.

"If one presents the Church as the prolongation of the Incarnation, as the Mystical Body living through the centuries, as Christ speaking His Truth through His Body, as He once spoke it through His human nature, then there is no need of refuting a sect that came into existence 1,600 years after the death of Christ."

"But why do my friends make it a personal issue?"

"Oh, that's easy to explain," he said. "They're afraid if you come into the Church you will have given over your life to a supernatural order while they are still

functioning in a natural order. You, therefore, will have betrayed the world and your doing so would be a reproach to them and their way of life. Remember Our Lord said, 'I have taken you out of the world; therefore the world will hate you.'"

I told Monsignor I thought this antagonism was sharpened by the prevalent conception that Catholicism taught that all Christians not in allegiance to Rome were bound for Hell. I said that I, myself, had always stoutly defended the right of every man to light his own candle on his own altar and so it was important to get this charge ironed out.

He said: "The Church grants that souls can achieve salvation if they live up to the highest light of which they are aware and strive to do God's will as it is revealed to them. Many people brought up in other faiths have their minds prejudiced against the Church and are never exposed to the kind of Catholics who could inspire them to change their views. Those who are without the proper chances to discover the Church founded by Christ have what is called 'invincible ignorance.' Many Christians are potential members of the visible Church; many, too, are psychological Catholics before they are theological Catholics."

The Monsignor has clarity of exposition and originality of illustration. As he talks, no object within his reach is safe from his use in pointing an example. Ashtrays, water glasses, pencils, pens, ink bottles, take on lives of their own under his pictorial magicianship.

I told him there were a great many dogmas of the Church which I felt I could never accept. I admitted,

however, that I was at the crossroads of two alternatives: submission to the Church or no fixed belief at all. I said although I had come gradually nearer the Church it was most reluctantly—in fact, I had practically moved heaven and earth to find a way out of it! Chiefly because I so disliked the idea of having to put a curb on my freedom of thought.

He denied this: "Most people outside the Faith haven't the faintest conception of the vast reaches and limitless vistas of Catholicism for the intellectual, the artist and those dedicated to the life of the Spirit. There are," he said using one of his sweeping gestures, "doors beyond doors. All facets of life—cultural, spiritual, artistic, social, political—are encompassed.

"Converts tell me they become so interested in learning more about the Faith that it becomes the absorbing occupation of their lives. But because the Church includes all life, none of their duties or talents is neglected."

I told him there was another thing which disturbed me: I felt that Catholicism was a somber religion and that the poor sad world was in need of happiness, adding I could do with a bit of it myself.

He threw back his head and laughed.

"But that is exactly what the Church does for you. It makes you happy. I keep on the go all the time but I am always happy." I had noticed this. His happiness is not the extrovert's synthetic kind, which can sometimes be annoying, but a deep, calm radiance that seems to burn from within.

He told me that he had recently been asked to the

Trappist Monastery in Gethsemani, Kentucky (where Thomas Merton, author of *The Seven Storey Mountain* is now a priest), to conduct a retreat.

"Talk about happiness! There are some two hundred monks there and their gaiety amounts almost to hilarity. They have given up the world's so-called comforts and pleasures and have found true *joie de vivre* in their wholehearted service to God. I had nothing to offer those holy ones—but they had a very great deal to offer me."

The Monsignor had moved to a chair beside my hospital table on which I keep my typewriter, innumerable loose sheets of paper, and pencils. He is an inveterate doodler—a pad-and-pencil man. After he has been to see you a few times you have such tools of his trade in readiness. But if you think the pages left behind by your distinguished guest will serve as memorabilia, you are in for a disappointment. For only Monsignor Sheen could interpret his doodling. Drawing is definitely not among his prolific talents. At the top of all the pages he left behind I found the initials "J.M.J." Since most of us, being egotists, unconsciously scribble our own monograms, I assumed the initials stood for an indecipherable form of F.J.S. Not at all! I was told it was an ejaculation to the Holy Family—"Jesus, Mary and Joseph." And that it often occasions consternation to some new secretary who comes across it for the first time at the top of every sheet of the Monsignor's manuscripts.

He looked up from his doodling to tell me more about happiness within the Church. "Father Gerald

Vann says, 'If you want to become a canonized saint you must first become a notoriously happy person.' All the saints have tried to write of their transcendent joy. St. Teresa of Avila said, 'We experience the greatest peace, calm and sweetness in the utmost depths of our being.' "

I interrupted to ask him if he didn't think it was a little premature to expect me to achieve a saint's happiness.

He smiled. "But of course it is true, as Evelyn Waugh, one of the English author-converts, wrote recently in *Life* magazine, 'The Church exists to make saints—saints of all of us.' As a matter of fact all true Christians, you, I, all of us are potential saints.

"The mystics," continued Monsignor, "who have felt the incomprehensible beauty, dignity and loveliness of the supernatural life are at a loss for words to describe it. They are like little children standing speechless before overwhelming grandeur."

Suddenly I was impelled to state my position honestly and unequivocally. I told Monsignor Sheen that I was still far from being a good prospect for him. That I realized he was a very busy man and of much value to many and that while I wished to learn about Catholicism, I had no intention of joining his church. That for him to give me private instructions would be a waste of his time.

"Oh, that's all right," he said, "I'll be happy, happy, happy to come and talk with you once a week. I shall place the teachings of the Church before you, and at all times you will have complete freedom of intellect

and will. At no time are you to feel under any obligation whatsoever. The decision must be your own. The Church will not take you without conviction. If at the end of our talks you remain unconvinced, I'll go away and we shall remain friends."

It sounded as if I had nothing to lose and I was glad when he said he would come the following Saturday at the same hour to give me my first formal introduction to "dat ole-debbil" Roman Catholicism.

14

How He Does It

FOR his first instruction Monsignor arrived a quarter of an hour early. Obviously that day I was the recipient of the "now moment."

Seated, he began at once, and so serious was his approach that I realized our other discussions of Catholicism had been mere trial balloons. This was the real stuff. Like a general he marshalled his forces. Briskly, tersely, he outlined his plan of action.

"Our time will be limited to one hour weekly. The course usually runs from forty to one hundred hours, depending on circumstances. I'll talk about one subject for thirty minutes. After which you may ask me questions, provided they are relevant to the topic under discussion. The whole Catholic argument is based on reason and history. The one thing all of us have in common is reason. That is why we start with it. We can no more begin with the Bible than with the Koran."

Were shock tactics part of the Sheen technique? Incredulously, I asked, "Not the Bible or faith?"

"I don't blame you for being surprised. I assume that is the approach of most conversions outside the Church. But you must accept or reject our claims as the logical conclusion of reasoned argument. Today we'll confine our talk to proofs of the existence of God."

"You don't have to prove His existence to me, Monsignor. I believe in God."

"Merely to believe in God is not enough. If there is a God, He must be attainable. The Church helps us to know the Reality, which is a direct, immediate experience."

He was stating my lifelong goal with uncanny exactitude. Even so, I thought I was in for it, that this proving the existence of God was going to be dull. There were so many questions I longed to have answered. I wanted to point this out to him, but felt it would disturb his carefully thought-out *modus operandi*, which I suspected had been reduced to an inflexible formula. (How wrong I was!)

He talked for forty minutes. As deftly as a juggler tossing balls in the air, he presented me with the most profound philosophies of the ages.

Questions? I had none.

When he had finished I felt equipped to go out and prove the existence of God "from history and reason" to the most erudite atheist or a member of the Politburo. It made my former childlike faith in God seem very childlike indeed.

The lessons continued. Each Saturday Monsignor came at the same hour. One by one he took up the

much disputed dogmas of the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Communion of Saints, the Holy Eucharist, the Mass, Confession, Penance, Indulgences, Holy Orders, Extreme Unction, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory.

In the beginning at the very mention of each of these prejudice-rooted words my resistance rose like porcupine quills.

And each time I thought: This is it! Believe me, there'll be plenty rebuttal when my turn comes this session!

Monsignor would sit there talking or jump up to dramatize some point he was driving home (and what a great actor he is!) while I, listening with intense concentration, often found myself gripping my pink satin spread with drenched fists. It was difficult, it was arduous, it was an exhausting business. And here was one course which I could not ask my father to have discontinued as he had done in my private-school days, merely by declaring the subject to be "distasteful to Gladys." And I am sure to his staunchly Protestant soul this subject would have been the most distasteful of all.

I was constantly on the alert, hoping, I think, to catch Monsignor out so that I might rush in with some fine show of what my old mammy Addie called "gumption," if only to prove that I was no intellectual pushover.

But in every single lesson he cleared the theological hurdle so skillfully that I wanted to present him with cups and ribbons.

Catholic instruction with conversion as its objective, as the Monsignor himself has said, is never easy. But as time went on, instruction under Fulton Sheen became not only a thrilling and dynamic adventure for mind and spirit but an hour of aesthetic delight. His chain of Catholic reasoning, linking fact with indisputable fact, squashed most of the bigoted charges which had been held up to me in dire warning. So impressed was I with his scholarship which leapt athletically from peak to peak of culture, ancient and modern, and which was expressed in the rhythmic cadenced prose of the celebrated voice, that I wanted to share it. I had the impulse to run out and call in the maids and waiters and bellboys and doormen, and the people in the lobby and all the people passing by and issue an invitation in the words of Isaiah:

"Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters . . . come ye and eat . . . eat that which is good . . . and your soul shall be delighted."

Like Clare Boothe Luce, the most discussed Catholic convert since Chesterton, who had warned Monsignor that she could never accept his teaching of Hell, at the end of the thorniest dogmas I, too, succumbed and wanted to stand up and cry out: "Dear God, what an advocate you have in this man!"

Even so, we were flying into headwinds.

For though Monsignor Sheen had convinced me in the main of the truth of Catholicism, there were still points which disturbed me greatly.

And here is a strange coincidence. From what I

have been told I believe it applies to most would-be converts.

We do not resist most what we most expect to resist.

Very often it comes about that the stiffest doctrine falls into place if handled, not by the most kindly intentioned layman, but by the expert obviously most competent to do so—the Catholic priest.

But there comes a time during the instructions—and just when we think the whole shimmering vista is laid open to view—when we discover we have an Iron Curtain of our own contrivance.

And so it was with me.

Frequently Monsignor Sheen with a few shattering sentences would level obstacles over which I had thought to do battle only to have some almost extra-curricular objections arise in my mind. When this happened I would ask him to put aside his scheduled lesson and deal with them.

One day I told him that it seemed almost impossible to abandon some of the teachings of the Eastern philosophers to which I had been attracted in my Search. They still called to me like siren songs.

I realized then his great tolerance. "All these men, Mohammed, Confucius, Lao Tse, Buddha, were good men. They were teachers of ethics, and humanitarians. They lived and preached and edified and left behind them a beautiful memory. But they were not what Christ claimed to be, what His miracles witnessed—the Son of the Living God.

"And they knew it. Even Buddha said: 'I am not the true Light which is to come.'

"Christ not only presented His credentials," Monsignor continued, "but He was foretold. Not only by Gentile and Jewish prophets (that is what they were for) but by inspired poets and dramatists predating His birth by hundreds of years."

Dimly I recalled those voices crying out from the Old Testament read during my school days and which then had meant little to me, but were now revived:

"Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son . . ."

"And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea are not least among the cities . . ."

"A branch shall come up from the root of Jesse and thus a flower shall spring from that root. . . ." (I was reminded that Jesse was the father of King David and even I knew that Christ was descended from the House of David.) Monsignor repeated that we did not have to depend solely on the Bible for prophecy and proved his point by quoting lines from Virgil, Homer, Sophocles—*Prometheus Bound* and from many of the pre-Christian poets.

He went on enlarging for me the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ which is the taproot of all Catholic doctrine.

Now he was the gardener-priest. With expert skill and delicacy he removed the incrustations of scalelike leaves from his most precious bulb to reveal the life core at its center.

It took time; it took painstaking effort; it took lesson after lesson; more than at any other point it took the mighty application of the prayer Monsignor gives at

the outset of instruction: "Pray for the intelligence to see the Truth and the will to follow it."

All my life as an Episcopalian I had repeated the Nicene and Apostles' creeds word for word as they are said in the Mother Church of all Christian churches and from which they are derived. But only now did I realize that I had no idea of their immense connotation.

That Catholics believe Jesus Christ was literally the incarnation of God—God assuming human form—is a belief which dawns slowly, then bursts with terrific impact on the Protestant consciousness.

He was more, then, than our concept of a good man, a great ethical teacher, being occasionally united with His Father in prayer. The little child we celebrate at Christmas lying in Mary's arms in that dark cave and the man suffering and dying on Calvary's cross was what the creed said He was, all right—"Light of Light . . . Very God of Very God." But now I saw that He was something more—far more. Something the Catholics seemed to know all the time.

He was Almighty God.

I thought back to one of the earlier lessons when my instructor had told me that the pivotal point of most conversions was the revelation of the Divinity of Christ. I had not the faintest idea why he was laboring the point. For I thought I and all Christians believed it, too.

Later in the middle of an instruction I said to Monsignor, "Oh, I see, God decided to come down from Heaven and take on a human form because we

can love a human being and not an abstraction."

Now I saw, and saw also the meaning of the lines:

Whose closed eyes find the
Face of God
In patient prayer,
Has looked as Euclid never could
On Beauty bare.

Now that this very illumined instructor had made it clear that Christ was the essence of the godhead, many scales fell from my eyes concerning principal dogmas, which followed naturally and made eminently good sense.

In view of this it was somewhat incongruous that there remained for my acceptance only such relatively simple matters as the Church's teaching on the Virgin Mary, the problem of suffering, and confession.

However, these required yeoman service on the part of the long-suffering Monsignor and made me also realize that conversion can be—and very often is—a double-edged knife. The painful operations came about under extraordinary circumstances and made me aware for the first time of what my instructor called "supernatural grace."

Because I had heard that Monsignor Sheen has a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin and has in his private chapel an exquisite figure of her in Lalique glass, I approached the subject tentatively.

Then one afternoon because it still lurked in the shadows of ambiguity I blurted out my pet aversion.

I said that the whole idea of the Virgin Mary left

me cold. In fact that it was definitely repellent to me. That it seemed far-fetched and dragged into worship which I felt should be confined to Almighty God.

Heaven help me! I said that it seemed to belong to the same category as the "Mom Cult," which had sprung up in America. I went on and on and on.

Monsignor sat very still, his eyes dark with sorrow. He was probably offering up a "Hail Mary" for Our Lady's intercession in my behalf at that very moment. Finally, he said quietly:

"We do not adore the Blessed Virgin. We venerate her and why shouldn't we?"

"If you could have pre-existed your own mother and had had the power to fashion her according to your ideals, wouldn't you have made her the sweetest, the purest, the most lovely woman who ever lived? Even from the human point of view—suppose I were invited to your home and ignored your mother. Wouldn't that be an insult to one you loved? Wouldn't Our Lord suffer the same disappointment if we failed to show some respect for His beloved mother?"

"When you have come truly to believe in the Divinity of Christ you will know that Mary is the Mother of God and you will venerate her also."

Even speaking of her lifted his mood and he said brightly: "Tell you what you do. Ask Our Lady to intercede for you and she will grant you so many favors that you too will come to love her."

To illustrate the Blessed Mother's goodness, he told me a story: "God was walking through Heaven one day and saw some souls he thought were suspect.

He said to St. Peter, 'I see some people who shouldn't be here, Peter.'

"And Peter replied, 'It's not my fault, God. Every time I close the door, Mary opens the window.'"

As he was leaving, Monsignor said: "You'll ask her to pray for you?"

Halfheartedly, I promised.

How ashamed I was of that stormy outburst when a few months later it was Monsignor's "lovely lady dressed in blue" who took me gently under her mantle and led me through harrowing days and nights, when not even the prayers and painstaking guidance of one of her most devoted sons would have saved me from the most tragic mistake of my life.

15

Experiment Perilous

IN 1949 announcement of the "wonder-drugs," ACTH and Cortisone, exploded on the world as dramatically as the dropping of the A-bomb at Hiroshima.

To describe the results when used in the treatment of formerly incurable conditions, the most conservative doctors used a word ordinarily handled with sugar tongs in medical hall and laboratory—the word "miracle."

Not only were the crippling forms of rheumatoid arthritis alleviated but astonishing results were reported in lupus, rheumatic fever, gout, leukemia and other diseases of which the causes were unknown.

Because my hypoproteinemia fell into this idiopathic category, Dr. Tyson justifiably hoped that one of the mysterious drugs might prove beneficial to my equally mysterious malady.

But how to obtain it? At the time, both drugs were far more precious than radium or pigeon blood rubies—they were in truth "without money and without price."

Then one day at the beginning of February Dr. Tyson greeted me, blue eyes blazing with the excitement of a hunter who, after hard going and an empty bag, suddenly scents game.

"I've got it," he said, "enough ACTH for experimental purposes. You are to be admitted to Harkness Pavilion on Sunday and you'll be there for about a fortnight."

My unquenchable optimism caught fire from Dr. Tyson's and the flame was further fanned by receiving, a few days later, a letter from Dr. Tom Spies who had done outstanding work with the "wonder-drugs" at his Hillman Clinic in Birmingham, Alabama. Because Dr. Spies was one of the great pioneers in deficiency diseases, his opinion had been sought by interested friends in my behalf, though he, like his other brilliant colleagues, had nothing to offer.

But now he was greatly impressed over my "one chance in a million" of being privileged to be an ACTH guinea pig. Whether it might prove helpful neither he nor anyone else could guess. From his clinical experience with the drug he wrote: "Body chemistry is different in each person. Of two patients with the same disease, one will show definite improvement and the other will get worse."

To be sure no one knew exactly how Adreno-Cortico-Trophic (ACTH) worked on the human organism. But it was taken from the pituitary of the lowly hog, and therein lay for me the greatest apprehension.

I was allergic to pituitary! Hitherto the most in-

infinitesimal amounts had occasioned violent hives. Not only every inch of my body was covered with red itching wheals but mine were the laryngeal type which choked off my breathing and threw me in and out of consciousness for several hours. Once when a pituitary injection had been administered in a Boston hospital, the reaction was so grave that my family was sent for. And all that I knew about ACTH was that it was a pituitary substance far more potent than any I had previously been given.

Moreover, the day before my admission to Harkness, *The New York Times* carried an article that the American Medical Association had condemned both ACTH and cortisone! For the first time since the rave notices of the wonder-drugs the article told of some of the hitherto unreported effects: "Faces became moons; hair growth became abnormal; irreversible diabetes was produced; rashes appeared and the mind was affected." Waldemar Kaempffert, the *Times'* scientifically accurate reporter, said that he "doubted if any brain surgeon who cared about his reputation would approve of the use of cortisone or ACTH."

On the other hand another group upheld the wonder-drugs. It was impossible to deny the lightninglike cessation of pain in bedridden arthritics, of their being able sometimes to walk after dosages given over a twenty-four-to-forty-eight-hour period and of the startling results in other diseases.

In any case for me the die was cast. I was going through with it.

The late afternoon of the Saturday before my admission to Harkness, I received my regular instruction from Monsignor Sheen. As he was leaving I told him about my "experiment perilous" and that I was downright frightened.

He gave me his blessing, a very special one, using, as he does on only very rare occasions, his precious relic of the True Cross. Afterwards he said slowly and meditatively: "You won't die, I promise you. You are a catechumen, which means you are earnestly seeking the Truth, and God won't let anything happen to you until your efforts are rewarded."

He gave me his private phone number in Washington, saying I was not to hesitate to call him at any hour, day or night. I could think of no emergency which would make me impose my needs on his overburdened schedule. But his words were a shining armor for entering a combat in which I felt very expendable.

On February 6th, I was admitted to Harkness for Operation ACTH. My part of the bargain for the privilege of being experimented upon was that I should permit any or all of the doctors "to observe." And from the time of my admission it seemed as if the entire staff of the Medical Center held its breath.

For several days preceding the application of ACTH, preliminary metabolic studies were inaugurated by their Dr. London with atomic isotopes. But as relatively novel as was the use of this atomic material, it was like a side show compared to the performance about to begin under the Big Top.

Knowing of my allergy to pituitary, Dr. Tyson proceeded with caution. The injections were scheduled for every six hours. I was awakened on the dot of the charted hours.

The nurses, all agog, told me that even after twenty-four hours some of their patients had shown such elation that it was all they could do to keep them from dancing down the corridors or bursting into song in the middle of the night. I could do, I remarked, with some of the same and waited expectantly.

For three days the dosage of five milligrams of the fabulous ACTH was administered every six hours. And I—I felt absolutely nothing. Meanwhile the doctors came and went, quizzing me in infinite detail. Usually I had my typewriter across my bed, working on this book. (I didn't dare think about the possibility of hives.) On the fourth day it was decided to step up the dosage to ten milligrams, at the same six-hour intervals. The first day's result—zero. Except, even with heavy sedation, I slept only two hours out of the twenty-four.

On the morning of the fourth day of the increased dosage, I awakened with an abnormal roaring in my head and exhaustion such as I, who was an expert on this symptom, had never experienced, and extreme irritability. On the sixth day these symptoms continued: the irritability and nervous tension mounting to the point where I felt exactly like a mad dog. By the seventh day the effects were simply quite unendurable. That night a few hives appeared. I pressed my buzzer, asked for the house physician who put

through a call to Dr. Tyson. The experiment was called off.

So much for Operation ACTH.

Naturally I blamed no one. Common sense told me that the difference between competence and mediocrity in the modern specialist is imagination which, when a chronic ailment fails to respond to classical treatment, reaches out for untried therapy. And so at many different hospitals I had undergone many different experiments.

Because my intelligence demanded to know the rationale of every experiment, I understood that most of them guaranteed no more tangible results than the grasping at straws. But so eager was I to be cured that I had gone into them hopefully and was unreproachful when they failed. Consequently I had become known as a "co-operative patient."

Lying there in Harkness after ACTH had failed, I wondered how long I could continue to be co-operative.

A few of the experiments stood out: operations to obtain clues and which, due to protein deficiency, were undertaken at the risk of not coming out of the anesthesia; biopsies (snipped samples) from various organs, though all tests had shown them to be normal; pituitary injections which had almost cost me my life; transfusions of contaminated blood plasma resulting in a siege of jaundice which had felled me for an entire summer.

Because I was unwilling to permit my illness to affect the lives of those around me, I had insisted

upon going alone to these hospitalized experiments. Though I walked in under my own steam, not infrequently I left the hospital in a wheel chair and accompanied by a nurse.

So much for the physical cost. Only I knew what being hospitalized drained off in nervous energy. Psychologically so much hospitalization had built up a very real claustrophobia and it was only with the utmost will power that I could remain behind hospital walls. No prisoner on his way to Sing Sing ever went less willingly than did I to what I called my incarceration.

And now the wonder-drug ACTH, on which I had based such exultant hope, had proved more than a failure.

So many times I had come out of experiments with my condition worsened that I should have known better. I should have built up my defenses. Perhaps when I was able to have solitude, away from the hauling and pulling at the body, I should be able to gather my forces and cut my losses.

But not yet!

The experiment with ACTH had been called off at midnight and on top of everything else it was now Saturday afternoon. The regular nurses and doctors had departed for the week end, leaving a disinterested skeleton staff. The hubbub and bustle of week days had ceased and the corridors resembled a deserted graveyard.

Even the elements contributed to the general gloom. A rain and sleet storm lashed against the windows,

blanking out the inspiring view of the Hudson and the Washington Bridge with its garland of lights. The storm gained in fury. By five o'clock it was as dark as midnight.

If I had been at my hotel this would have been my instruction hour. But I knew, of course, that it would automatically be canceled. Monsignor Sheen, whose every minute from the time he arrived on Saturday until he boarded a plane back to Washington after his Sunday night broadcast, faced a split-minute schedule.

Then I heard—or thought I heard—that unmistakable, gentle tap on the door. But of course it was a figment of my highly wrought nerves. Could it be that that ACTH was causing me to have hallucinations?

But there it was again. I whispered, "Come in."

There he stood, looking neither storm-tossed nor annoyed by the long journey from the heart of Manhattan to 168th Street. The shining blueness of his eyes proclaimed his radiant mood. And there was extra reassurance in the friendly handclasp.

It had never occurred to him not to come! I was a catechumen and being an instructor was just now the will of God for him—hence no other duty took priority.

I hoped my tears weren't showing.

With his intuitive perception, he knew before I had spoken of the arduous ordeal and its crushing disappointment.

Being the most methodical of men, his instructions

are arranged step by step. An effectual plan in which dogmas questionable to the non-Catholic are dealt with before they are asked. Never had I known him to deviate. Usually after a brief greeting he sat down, and his quick mind would at once pick up the last words he had spoken to bridge the subject.

If the Saturday before he had been setting forth proofs of God's existence and had come, say, to Aristotle's Pure Act, on his next visit he would shift into the high gear of St. Thomas Aquinas' syllogisms without any noticeable transition.

But that was not to be his way that afternoon.

As if he had known before he came what would be needed, and though the subject was not included in his course, he asked whether I should like him to tell me how a Catholic handles the problem of suffering.

16

"Offering It Up"

SINCE it not only fitted my downcast mood but constituted one of the stumbling blocks to the Faith, I told Monsignor Sheen that I should greatly appreciate his explanation of the Catholic viewpoint on suffering. I also said that while he was about it would be good enough to clarify that somewhat maddening phrase, "offering it up," which Catholics use under all adversity—from not chewing gum during Lent to deathbed agonies.

He smiled fleetingly and rolling up the sleeves of his mind tackled what we both felt was not going to be a cinch instruction for the Protestant catechumens.

"Offering it up," he repeated. "That's just another way of accepting God's will for us."

"But," I protested, "I have been taught that it is God's will for us always to be well and happy. I learned this first in the Emmanuel Movement of the Episcopal Church, later through the healing cults of Christian Science, Unity, New Thought, et cetera. All

of them set as their premise the fact that Jesus healed and commanded his disciples to do likewise. They claim that health not only can, but must, be gained by prayer, good deeds and right thinking. And so if one is not feeling *la vie en rose* you have a sense of guilt as if you were failing to live up to Christian specifications."

"That is entirely erroneous," declared the Monsignor with a wide gesture which swept the optimist cults right out of the window and into the Hudson River. "To deny suffering is to deny the Cross, which is a blasphemy and contrary to the fundamentals of Christianity.

"People in the world can't understand the Catholic position towards suffering because they assume pain to be the ultimate evil and the avoidance of suffering the Christian's chief concern. Furthermore, modern man is more *afraid* of pain than of sin. He has little scruple about sinning—he may even deny the existence of sin. Religion for him then is useless unless it can eliminate pain."

This neatly delivered spanking of a self-indulgent age was followed by one of Monsignor's meaningful summations: "This dodging of pain at all costs comes when you appraise life by measurements of time—but when life is appraised by eternal standards, suffering becomes an honor."

"What about Jesus' miracles of healing?"

"Oh, those were only thrown out as bait."

To my look of shocked amazement he went on. "Or if you prefer, miracles were a 'motive of credibility.'

Our Lord said, 'If ye will not believe me, believe my works.' Healing the sick and changing the water into wine were done only to make people receptive to Our Lord's teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven. For it was only by material means that he could reach those sunk in materialism. Only one thing is really of any importance and it is contained in the teaching, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven.'

"All you have to do," he went on, "is to examine the lives of the Saints. Most of them bore torturous diseases with serenity and spiritual joy. Even after they attained Union with God their physical condition often remained unchanged. Take Teresa of Avila. All her life she was racked by pain. Yet what she was and what she accomplished ring down the ages to our eternal edification. Look at Bernadette, who after her vision of Our Lady dug with her own hands the spring of water at Lourdes which has brought healing to countless thousands. After she became a nun and was still quite young it was found that she was suffering from a painful and incurable disease. When the Reverend Mother told her she was to be taken to Lourdes, Bernadette refused. With a sweet smile she said: 'When Our Lady appeared to me she said I would suffer all my life. I am happy to do God's will. No, the waters are not for me.'"

"Then why does anyone try to be cured, Monsignor, if suffering is one way to achieve sainthood?"

"Please," he put out both hands as if to block such misunderstanding, "it is our duty to try to keep our God-given health—to blot out suffering wherever we

may find it. That is why you find the Church establishing hospitals and sending doctors and nurses to foreign lands. Suffering, *per se*, is not a good thing. But sometimes it is God's will that suffering should come to us in order to carry out His plan for our soul's development and that we should *not* be able to avoid it. Then it can be turned from an evil thing into a thing of great value."

"By 'offering it up,' Monsignor?"

"Exactly. By accepting it. The secret of all growth in spirituality—and that is what we are on earth for—is identification with the will of the Father."

His eyes wandered over to the Palisades as if they would yield him one of the vivifying examples which liberally sprinkle his talk. Then, he told me of a young girl who goes in a wheel chair to the studio to hear his Sunday evening broadcasts. "Her body is twisted and deformed and she is seldom out of pain," he said, "but knowing her condition to be incurable she has accepted it in the Catholic tradition as a sign of God's favor to be transmuted into a glowing focus of love. I always seek her radiant face among the audience, to give me inspiration before I start speaking. She is, if you like, 'offering it up.' But I can tell you one thing: that young girl is going straight to Heaven and is creating a foretaste of it here on earth."

Being the most practical of men and never straying into generalities except to emphasize a point, he swung the subject back to my personal need:

"Never was anything truer than the two sayings:

'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,' and 'I will purge the tree that it may bear more fruit.'

"It is perfectly possible that without this illness you might never have brought your Search into the present investigation which will give you all Truth. Also it is possible that God wishes to use you and that you might accomplish even more as an invalid than if you were swallowed up in the strenuous activities of the world."

I had to admit that much of my resentment over my prolonged inactivity was due to my wish to continue my career. Long since I should have been off to the ends of the world interviewing Stalin, Mao, Tito and other figures in the news, as I had always done and for which my training had equipped me. Knowing the demands of journalism, I knew also that there should never have been this last year to devote to reading, to studying and taking weekly instruction in Catholicism and without which, with my analytical mind, conversion (if it did result) would have been out of the question.

"But, I assure you, Monsignor, even if I could learn the technique of 'offering up' my illness, none of my friends would allow me to do it—not for an instant. They would call it a defeatest attitude and insist that I *must* get well, come Hell or—"

"More likely, Heaven," he put in quietly. And continued: "None of that matters in the slightest. The reason people in the world think physical well-being is the end-all and be-all of existence is that they have

no realization of Eternity. They live, as I have said, in time and so must scurry about trying to accomplish what to them seems important. Believe me, what you are in God's sight is infinitely of more value than what you get done."

He sat in deep thought for a moment: "Instead of battling against the doctors' verdict that your cure has not yet been found, obey their instructions and do all you can to co-operate—which is certainly a part of Catholic teaching. But if healing does not come, learn to go on from hour to hour with as much serenity as possible. I promise you that with abandonment to the will of God comes an immense relief from strain.

"Dom Chapman, one of our greatest spiritual writers, who instructed members of religious orders, found this most helpful: 'Unite your will with God's will and wish for whatever He wishes to give you and will to be whatever He wills you to be.' In other words, surrender your will to God."

(I knew another great spiritual director who had also achieved that objective by "sanctification of the now moment.")

I told him I was afraid I did not know the technique of surrendering my will to God's will and living in the moment, that all my training had taught me to live not in the minute, nor the hour, nor the day, nor even in tomorrow but the day after tomorrow! Would he help me?

"But naturally! That is why I am here. And it makes me very happy, because when I am giving instruction in Catholicism, you see, I am doing God's Will for *me!*"

He picked up two small books from my bedside table, St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. "How much do you know about prayer?" he shot at me.

I confessed that my knowledge derived from undirected reading, had resulted—like my typing—in a "hunt and peck" system, and I asked if out of his vast experience as a man of prayer, he could give me a streamlined, practical method for everyday use.

He knew exactly what I was after. Reseating himself and looking very much more at home with the inevitable pad and pencil in his hand, Monsignor Sheen proceeded to make a plan, explaining as he went along.

"The most important thing to remember, I have found, is that in prayer the ear is more important than the tongue. Prayer is speaking *and* listening. Most people forget to listen. They regard prayer as a one-way street instead of a two-lane highway. So always take fifteen to twenty minutes to listen until you feel a response. If, as sometimes happens, you don't seem to get anything, keep on the next day and the day after."

He told me about vocal prayer—saying prayers aloud—which he declared was an excellent self-starter for devotions. "The Church," he said, "is a wise teacher, and having learned the best methods from the experience of praying men and women down through the ages, has made it part of a priest's duties to say his Office every day vocally. That is why you'll sometimes see one of us in a bus or train moving his

lips over a little black book—our breviary. This vocal prayer insures that each word will have value, that none is skipped over.”

Continuing, he spoke of ejaculatory prayer. He said this consisted of brief praises to God that could be repeated throughout the day to draw our thoughts back to God. He told me there were many such ejaculations to suit every mood and emergency—in danger, in sorrow, when depressed, when lonely, when tempted, and in thanksgiving. Monsignor’s favorite ejaculation, “My God, I love Thee,” he uses to express happiness. (And I thought it must be very well worn indeed!)

Returning to our prayer form, he explained meditation.

“The first part of your meditation is general. Pick a subject from a prayer, from the Gospels or from some devotional reading.” As an example, Monsignor gave me Jesus in the Garden facing the Crucifixion. “Think about it. Picture it with your imagination. Our Lord’s patience, His petitionary prayer, then His ending as all petitionary prayers should end, with ‘Not my will but Thine be done.’

“After you have made your general example, apply it to yourself by making a resolution. Always personalize your meditation. For instance, if you have been meditating on Jesus’ patience in the Garden, resolve that whatever irritations or temptations may confront you during the day, you too will be patient—even with those extra people who, so annoyingly, interrupt your work.”

Next he came to petitionary prayer.

"It is perfectly legitimate for you to pray for yourself as well as for others and pray always quite definitely and absolutely. All prayer is answered. If it is not in the way you wish it to be, accept it as knowing that God knows what is best for your spiritual development—which is all that really matters. One of the most comprehensive petitionary prayers is the Collect *Pro devotis amicis* 'grant health of body and health of soul to those for whom we implore Thy mercy; That they may love Thee with all their strength and with all their love carry out Thy will.'"

He spoke then of the prayer of contemplation and adoration. "In this part of your devotions ask for nothing. The true lover never wants anything for himself. Try to feel your love for God. This includes also thanksgiving, which we are so likely to forget. Some of the religious orders like the Benedictines spend their lives praising God . . . their lives are built around the Holy Office."

"Don't they pray for others in the world?"

"Oh, yes, but that is secondary to praising and adoring God. However, there are the great Reparation orders, whose prayers are directed primarily for those in the world, often for those they do not know. This goes back to Our Savior, who never worked a miracle for Himself but Who gave His *life* in reparation for our sins.

"Finally," said Monsignor, "you gather a 'spiritual bouquet' from your devotions and use it for your refreshment throughout the day."

But I had one other question before the prayer package was wrapped up.

"What about the Protestant objection that Catholics pray to statues of the Saints?"

"Nonsense," he said quickly, "we venerate the saints because they have attained the highest heights of holiness that is possible on earth. They have loved God and have given their lives to serving Him and their neighbors and naturally they are very special friends of God. We ask them to intercede for us."

He gave me the practical example: "If you wish a favor of anyone, is it unnatural to ask a friend of that person to plead your case for you?"

"How do Catholics get a devotion to a certain saint?"

"By reading about him, growing to admire him, and by experiencing answers to his prayers for intercession with God. The greatest saint of all, of course, as a mediatrix, is Mary, the Mother of God."

The nurse appeared with my supper tray and almost dropped it when she recognized my celebrated visitor. Over Monsignor's polite protest, I waved her away. Though the usual hour of his instruction period had sped past, there were other questions clamoring at my mind and he, too, seemed eager to get on with it.

As when from Saturday to Saturday he picked up the thread of his subject, he turned with facility back to his main theme of suffering.

"We seem to have made quite a detour," he said, "but not really, because prayer is the *modus operandi* of identification with the Will of God, by which suf-

fering becomes acceptable and through which we love God more."

I asked him how one learned to love God without it being a worked-up, synthetic affair.

Then, as is often his way, he brought it down to homely, everyday examples: "By trying to please Him just as you do in human love. If your husband comes home and you are full of things you wish to talk about and he wishes to read his newspaper—especially if he is wild to get at the latest baseball scores or stock market reports—you remain quiet. If he likes orange juice for breakfast, you do not order prune juice. You make sacrifices in order to give him the most beautiful gifts, for your delight is in the delight of the beloved. All love, human and divine, demands sacrifice. As long as we have a human body, love can only be expressed by sacrifice."

I said I could see that but I was still unable to understand why "taking pain and liking it" were necessary to show our love of God.

"How could a God who is loving and merciful permit it?" I protested, with the threadbare Protestant argument.

I could see this was no new question to the great converter-priest, but he proceeded patiently, steadily: "We don't know why God permits suffering. But knowing that He is all good, we know that good does come out of apparent evil. And while we are not promised a life without suffering, we *are* promised strength to bear whatever He sends us. So by loving Him more and trusting in His love, whatever we have to bear

you may be sure redounds to our ultimate happiness; and after all, all we can offer up to God are our works, our possessions and our being. And *this* I can promise you; once you have made the oblation of physical suffering, joy ineffable such as you have never known will follow."

The fortnight of hospitalization, experimentation and disappointment had produced the nadir of physical, spiritual and mental unresponsiveness. And so I was not of a mind either to understand or to accept the Catholic practice of "offering it up."

With atavistic passion, sharpened by recent frustration and deeply grooved thought patterns, I voiced man's natural resentment against the age-old problem of good and evil.

Monsignor heard me out. Then sat very still. Being one of the world's most eloquent orators, even in his silences there is drama. Suddenly he leapt from his chair, reached into his pocket, and striding across the room, thrust something into my hand. "You may keep this," he said. I saw that it was a beautiful silver crucifix inlaid with black wood. It was old and slightly bent from much devotion.

This was the first crucifix I had ever held in my hands.

Emanations of great force, a holiness, seemed to spring from it. And was it any wonder? It had been given to him by Pope Pius XI, and Monsignor had used it for eleven years in his private devotions.

The sound of his voice drew my thoughts back from fantasy to the reality of instruction: "When you are

tempted to think your sufferings are too hard to bear, all you have to do is look at the crucifix and remind yourself, 'God let *that* happen!' But always bear in mind that Our Lord never spoke of His Crucifixion without His Resurrection. This was to teach us the glorious mystery that behind each private crucifixion is the seed of our own resurrection. We also know that God let Our Lady suffer."

He turned and stood looking out toward the Hudson, which was cloaked in deep night. Then turning, he reseated himself: "Keep your crucifix always near you. You will find it is a whole library of which you are sole custodian. It will remind you also of the great martyrs of the Church.

"You don't have to go back to the early Christian era which is the only one we generally associate with martyrdom. Our own so-called civilization is producing its full quota."

He repeated two unforgettable examples and with such effectiveness that I realized why Monsignor Sheen has been called Communism's most potent single foe.

He told me that just before Father Pro of Mexico was shot a few years ago by revolutionists, he turned to them and said: "I forgive you; kneel and I will give you my blessing," and that every soldier in the firing line fell to his knees. Only the Captain refused to kneel and it was he, Monsignor declared, who did what to Father Pro was "an act of triumphant joy, ushering him by a blow through the heart, into the glorious company of martyrs."

Monsignor Sheen also told me that during Spain's recent Civil War when the Reds were slaughtering hundreds of priests, one of them was lined up before the firing squad with his arms bound. Facing them, the Spanish priest said: "Untie these ropes and let me give you my blessing before I die." The Communists untied the ropes, but they cut off his hands saying sarcastically: "All right, see if you can give us your blessing now." Continuing, Monsignor said: "The priest raised the stumps of his arms as crimson rags with blood dripping from them like beads forming on the ground the red rosary of redemption and he moved them about in the shape of a cross."

I knew from that moment that if there remained in me any taint of corroding self-pity, against which I had battled so long with human weapons, this priest out of our own country and times, with his medicine of the spirit, had exorcised it forever.

A new, radiant vista opened before me. Now that there was purpose in suffering, I knew that I could take it and perhaps—like the Catholics whose phrase was not so annoying any more—I, too, could "offer it up."

17

Seeking the "Evidence of Things not Seen"

ON THE second Saturday in Lent as Monsignor Sheen finished the instruction hour, I asked him if he thought I was making any progress.

"If I didn't think so, I shouldn't be here," he said, and added one of the few personal remarks he ever made during the entire course: "I'm very pleased with you—after all, you've had only about three months of instruction."

I breathed a sigh of relief. There was still lots of time, then. But there was also very much more to learn. However, since Monsignor had told me that his course usually required from forty to one hundred hours, I relaxed.

So I was not prepared when the following Saturday, he paused at the door as he was leaving to announce:

"You'll be ready for your First Communion by Palm Sunday."

And he was gone.

Seizing the calendar on my bedside table, I checked off the remaining interval. Three more weeks! The evidence would be in. For better or for worse the issue would be joined.

Then what had seemed rational to suppose would be one of the most exultant hours of my life was one of panic.

I argued with myself. This was only the pull of submerged currents in the mind's undertow, surging into a full tide of resistance.

Or perhaps, more simply, the old tendency to claustrophobia which had made me feel so physically hemmed-in by the four walls of a hospital room now making me feel mentally trapped.

Surely there was no need of this. At no time had Monsignor exerted any pressure. Always he had made it clear that the decision must be my own.

The instruction offered out of his vast learning, bulwarked by thousands of brilliant scholars who for centuries had discovered the best results of theology and philosophy, had sown the seed, appealing as he had promised to "history and reason." Hence, intellectually, those prickly pears of doctrinal objections wrought of ignorance and misrepresentation had, one by one, been stripped of their wounding burs.

Why then was I so reluctant to take the final step to enter the Church? Could it be that I was like William Cobbett, author of *History of the Reformation*?

When Cobbett was traveling in Yorkshire he called

on an old priest, who said: "I can't understand how a man who could write so profound a book on the Reformation doesn't become a Catholic."

"Indeed," said Cobbett, "and now, my friend, there's one thing I can't understand."

"What's that?" said the priest.

"I can't understand that a man who has studied theology doesn't realize the difference between conviction and *conversion*."

I, too, was waiting for some sign of supernatural grace, which I had supposed usually accompanied conversion. I had heard that most converts, looking back, can trace concrete examples of the work of grace in their natural lives.

But not I! To be sure, shadowy outlines of occurrences throughout my life, unremarked as they happened, began to emerge. Throughout that wakeful night they tiptoed on the threshold of consciousness as if beseeching recognition. Could they be the story line of a drama held in the hands of a Master Craftsman?

As a child I had been drawn to the Catholic Church but was forbidden the most casual visit inside its doors by parents victimized by those ancient clichés repeated against the Faith.

As a young woman trying to find a foothold in New York, I had gone often in the lonely twilight to a West Side church and had knelt there in the gleam of vigil lights, not knowing what I was doing, but finding solace. It was from this same Church of the Blessed Sacrament, twenty years later, that by some

fateful chance I heard Monsignor Sheen's Christmas Eve broadcast which had sent me back to him.

Once on a self-assignment for no newsworthy reason, I had made a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Anne de Beaupré; on my knees had ascended the Holy Stairs; had met and talked with a saintly priest who, I now recalled, said he would pray for me and prophesied that one day I would become a Catholic.

In Italy more than once I had hired a car and motored alone over the long and sharply curving Amalfi Drive to the Capuchin monastery; wandered in the cloistered gardens; felt peace there as the chanting of the monks echoed on the translucent air, and always was reluctant to come away.

Wherever or at whatever time Gounod's *Ave Maria* was played or sung it stirred a deep nostalgia "for something afar." An occultist attributed this—not to my complete satisfaction—to my having been a nun or a monk in a former incarnation!

In my room—that "Room of One's Own" where I worked and passed my sleeping hours—its only ornaments were those I had collected lovingly and at great pains in my travels: the della Robbia Madonna; the Titian "Magdalen"; the niche-held porcelain virgin from Austria; the reliquary, the icon, the rosary.

None of these was collected for the purpose of creating "atmosphere." In fact it had always shocked me to see a holy vestment flung across the edge of a piano or a chalice transformed into a vase.

Yet my most treasured possessions were so unmistakably Catholic that one caller summed up the gen-

eral effect by exclaiming: "What do you think this is—the Sistine Chapel!"

Some tatters of verse written before I had any knowledge of the technique of poetry crept into my mind. Set down in my debutante year when life moved to gay and syncopated measures, I had not thought of them for twenty years. Of no consequence as poetry, the inner core of them now seemed strangely significant.

I recalled the last lines of a verse written after remarking the detachment of two nuns in a noisy downtown street:

And in their quiet eyes the faith
Which says: "*I know, I know.*"

Another, after having experienced disillusionment in one of my first romances. Its title, *Union*, and its closing lines indicated an unconscious longing for that union with God which I was to come upon, later, in my reading of the mystics:

Is this the love known but to those
Who seek His love in perfect self-surrender?

And *Oneness*, with the dimly-perceived goal of Becoming:

One with the beggar whose eyes are starved
and burning;
One with the harlot . . .

For I had begun to see that "we are all members one of another" and that even the degraded are in their

mistaken lives seeking a way of "becoming" something other than they are.

And though I was ignorant of the sacrifice of God made Man—that great central theme of the Catholic Mass—another poem, in its entirety, seemed to hold a very un-Protestant view of the suffering Christ.

Offer me not your laughter and delights
For I have waked upon the midnight hour;
I have kept vigil with the deeps of life
I have known tearstain and the need of prayer.
Quip and light gesture ill become me now,
For me the knotted wand, the bitter brew.

They say of Him Who trod the Eastern hills
That merry words fell often from His lips;
That like a candle set upon a sill
Flashed the far radiance of his smiling glance.
But as for me I cannot hold it true,
I want the Savior the Old Masters knew
Of pain-drawn mouth; of darkened eyes and brow;
A Man who bore the thorn and gaping wound,
Not purple robe and festive wreath and ring.

Somehow I know—yet know not how I know—
He could not put aside for one bright day
The storms that beat against His gentle breast
Bearing the total heartbreak of a world.

Whence had they sprung, those words so gropingly Catholic? From the Unseen Hand which guides our least creative effort?

And the most convincing operation of grace was, of course, Monsignor Sheen himself.

By no human manipulations on my part, I had been privileged to receive personal instruction from the one priest who, under the circumstances, could have reached me. For I am convinced that for every individual there is "the right man to speak the right word in the right moment of time." More than one Protestant by receiving instructions from a priest who was "wrong" for him had come away shattered by the delicate operation of conversion.

There was my instant recognition in Monsignor Sheen of the quality I had so rarely met with in the most worthy men of the cloth—pure spirituality, untarnished by the faintest breath of worldliness.

And it was for this my soul perished. We are so immersed in materialism that one earnestly bound to the Search demands that our ministers be what the word implies—ministers of the soul. As Barbara Spofford Morgan, prominent Congregationalist, has said: "Protestant ministers busy themselves with playgrounds, sociables, and young people's clubs . . . and so are less able to speak the purifying word."

With Monsignor Sheen it was different. His teachings were confined to Truth, words that fell like fresh dew from Heaven upon the parched wasteland of my spirit.

I thought of his painstaking and time-consuming efforts on my behalf; of his limitless giving of whatever was needed to his converts and yet of his rigid refusal to accept from them gifts of any kind; of how he, himself, practiced to a greater extent than anyone I had known, the three rules he gives to young Sem-

inarians seeking his counsel: Kindness; Kindness; Kindness.

What then was lacking? Faith? And were not these manifestations of grace handmaidens of faith? I had dimly perceived the substance of things hoped for; must I greedily demand more evidence of things not seen?

John A. O'Brien, Notre Dame's Professor of Philosophy, describes faith as "putting one's hand in the Hand of God with the certainty that God will not mislead us."

Monsignor Sheen had given the signal. In his priestly office of mediator between God and man, could not I trust his illumined intuition that I was ready?

I decided that I could.

Only a fortnight remained before the Palm Sunday week end when Monsignor planned to receive me into the Church. This left just a few hours of instruction on those still esoteric ceremonials of Baptism, Confession, First Communion, and Profession of Faith. Though my ignorance about these final steps, especially Confession, was profound, I felt confident Monsignor would deal with them as competently as he had with all the other stumbling blocks.

It is not unusual for a convert on the eve of participating in the immense Sacraments by which he makes his submission to Rome to go into retreat. And while I knew convents like the Cenacle provided for this spiritual preparation, I knew also that it would not be possible for me to take advantage of it. However, I

was hoarding the final week for meditation and study. In my room at the Ritz, I would detach myself from all worldly thoughts and contacts and make a private retreat.

Meanwhile, there were arrangements of a different sort for me to make on my own.

Whenever I had contemplated my First Communion I had conceived of it, and in the best traditions of the Church, as a day of high festival. As why indeed should it not be? If, as Christianity teaches, we are in the world for the one purpose of perfecting ourselves for eternal life and if, as our Lord Christ said, "whosoever shall partake of My Body shall have eternal life," what then could possibly exceed the joyousness of receiving His Presence for the first time and becoming also a part of His Mystical Body—the Church—which He founded, here on earth?

Like Frances Parkinson Keyes, who writes so engagingly about her reception into the Church which took place at the Benedictine Abbey at Lisieux, I too would make this a gala. By long distance phone calls and telegrams, I would summon my nearest relations from distant places to be present at the Saturday afternoon ceremonies to be conducted by Monsignor for his converts at St. Patrick's Cathedral and for my First Communion there the following morning; after which of course there would be a Communion breakfast at the Ritz—with champagne for everyone.

Moreover it was spring—the season of the return of the sun—when all God's creatures instinctively bedeck themselves in fine feathers. And so I planned

carefully what I should wear. Surely it was suitable that my garments be as fair as those worn by the priests on great and special feast days. A famous designer would sew a dress for me; for the most important accessory of a woman's costume, I should have John-Frederics create an enchanting hat; Charles of the Ritz would do my hair.

Superficial fripperies? Not to a feminine woman. Norma Shearer once told me that during her early trouping days when she had been awakened by her rooming house being on fire, her first thought was: "What shall I wear!"

There was the matter of sponsors, too. Elsie Sloan Farley, whose sanctity and Christian charity made her the perfect choice, had promised should I come into the fold to serve as my Godmother. Gretta Palmer, who had initiated the meeting leading to instructions with Monsignor Sheen, had agreed to be my other sponsor. My lifelong Catholic friend, Margaret Clancey, former Wing Officer in His Majesty's Air Force, compared my Conversion Battle to the Battle of Britain! But she had helped me to victory by silence and by prayer and cabled she would be flying back from England for The Day.

Because I dared not announce this most momentous act of my life until it was nearer to being a *fait accompli*, and because it is not a subject one wishes to discuss via correspondence, I had said nothing about the eventuality of becoming a Catholic to any member of my family, except my husband.

Before beginning instructions, I had tentatively

asked how he would feel if I became a convert to Catholicism. With a tolerance which is more than theory, he had said: "If you ever become convinced that that is what you really want, I should have no right to offer any objection."

And while you might not call that the rousing support of a cheer leader, coming as it had from a four-generation Congregationalist and taciturn Vermonter, I took it as *carte blanche* to the Vatican!

Then *whang!* His Satanic Majesty launched a sneak attack.

18

The Devil Takes a Hand

THOUGH C. S. Lewis, in his *Screwtape Letters*, had introduced a certain low character into respectable Anglican circles, I, like most Protestants, put my own tongue-in-cheek interpretation on the Oxford don's best-selling profile and continued to believe that personified evil was one of the more fanciful superstitions of the medieval church and hence not to be worried about.

But in the following days, so consistently did every incident, both large and small, go berserk that anyone more knowledgeable of his subtle ways would have suspected the Devil had a hand in it.

Behind the scenes it was as though the Old Boy summoned his cohorts and issued his commands: "Scotch this conversion! Launch a sniping expedition of frustration, annoyances and 'bad timing,' so intolerable to weak-willed humans accustomed to having their own way. But hold your heavy ammunition, boys . . . just in case."

My family, obeying the doctors' decision that visit-

ing depleted my small stores of energy, had, with utmost consideration, not been to visit me for weeks. Though I longed for their warm human companionship, in view of the stresses and strains incident to conversion and the final decision to be made in the silent reaches of heart and will, this seemed Providential.

Now not only members of both my immediate families, for whom I happily put my best foot forward and who had a right to see me regardless of circumstances, but distant relatives—who in New England and the South extend to third and fourth cousins—converged on me from all points of the compass. Not one of these last precious days passed but one of them arrived in New York: some taking plane to Europe, others arriving from there; still others coming for spring shopping; the younger generation shuttling back and forth from different colleges for Easter vacations.

Even had I been moved to do so, so preoccupied was everyone with worldly pursuits that there was no opportunity to introduce what to me was a deeply sacred subject. Also involved were the canons of hospitality and good taste. You cannot say to a group of people merrily chatting over cocktails about the theater, parties, fittings and plane schedules, "Look, I'm going to—or at least I think I'm going to—join the Catholic Church."

Meanwhile all my plans for the Big Event were toppling one by one. Though the volley of first shots were of B.B. caliber compared to the all-out assault

to follow, not one arrangement remotely concerning my reception into the Church was left intact.

Certainly there was neither time nor strength left to put to fine feathers. I searched my wardrobe. And there arose in me that eternally feminine plaint uttered by Eve and echoed ever since by all her daughters—from the Colonel's Lady to Judy O'Grady—"I've nothing to wear!"

Though it was far from new and the thought gave me no pleasure, I decided to wear my Hattie Carnegie blue-violet suit. At least the color was appropriate since it was worn by the priests during Lent, and my friends had always said I liked any color just so it was violet. And it was true. I saw mauve in everything—in clouds, trees, shadows and mountains, and my wardrobe was dotted with garments in varying shades of violet.

I tried on the tiny matching pillbox hat for the Carnegie suit. Perched above the long, soft style in which my hair was kept regardless of changing hairdos, the hat was at least becoming.

Since I could not go to have my hair done, I asked to have my regular hairdresser sent to me. But the operator turned out to be a Frenchman out of Brooklyn. He whipped out his scissors: "Just ze snip here and there, Madame."

"But you mustn't *cut* it," I protested. "I loathe short hair and ears showing."

"But it is *nécessaire*, Madame, for ze chic shaping." Snip, snip, snip went the scissors. And to prevent the torrential chatter which shears in the hands of a hair-

dresser usually unleashes, I became absorbed in a magazine—gave myself over.

When he had gone, one horrified glance in the mirror and I flew to try on the pillbox. Not one strand of hair was showing. I was nothing but ears! I looked like the little man in the cartoon wearing a hat three sizes too big for him. That phony Frenchman had given me a crew cut!

Though I doubted if there was one woman living who was as desolate about her hair as I was at that moment, I tried to console myself by thinking of the nuns who cut off all their hair. They have nothing on me, I thought, taking another painful glance in the mirror. Very well, I would "offer this up" as a penance to my vanity.

Next my sponsors failed me.

A foreign-stamped letter brought news that Elsie Sloan Farley had gone on an unplanned Holy Year pilgrimage to Rome and the same post brought news that Gretta Palmer was on a fortnight lecture tour in Canada. Neither of them had foreseen that my instruction would be finished so soon.

Sponsors, of course, must be members of the Faith. My other Catholic friend was unable to arrange her plane reservation from England. Another chore for the Monsignor; he would have to find at least a god-mother for me.

Though I was disappointed by the removal of those three friends who I hoped would keep me from feeling so much a stranger in a strange land, there was another matter causing me graver disturbance.

Day and night I worried about the general confession, which is one of the four steps by which one is received into the Church. Wishing to shoo away this bug-a-boo, Margaret had acted with that practicality characteristic of "birthright" Catholics in their service to the Faith. She took me via taxi to St. Patrick's Cathedral. Marching me past a good many worshipers who, I felt, had their eyes fastened on me (but who I was to learn were going quite undistractedly about their private devotion), she led me with a firm grip right up to an unoccupied confessional box. Whisking aside the dark curtain, she showed me the grille behind which the priest sits to hear confessions and to administer absolution. I saw the narrow, hard ledge on which the penitent kneels. Timidly, I stepped inside. In order that I might become familiar with the unfamiliar, my friend closed the curtain, leaving me alone in that tiny cell of pitch-black darkness.

Even without a strange priest sitting behind the screen, I wanted to take to my heels. How much more agonizing it would be when I had to kneel there and pour out a recital of all the sins extending back through a lifetime. Well, there just did not seem enough time left in the world for such a recital, much less while kneeling on that miserable board on my very tender Protestant knees.

Did I hear an insistent little whisper in my ear? "Bit of Papist mumbo-jumbo! Protestants don't believe the individual needs an intermediary when talking to God."

I had no sooner shushed that imp of Satan when another hissed, "Claustrophobia."

That one got me. I am sure no human being ever departed a confessional box with as much dispatch as I left that one. Upon reflection I thought perhaps the phobia against it was a deserved penance for trespassing on sacerdotal territory.

However, it was now Saturday afternoon and time for my instruction hour. Since Monsignor had said this lesson would be on Confession, it could not have been of more vital importance to me. But shortly before six o'clock, one of my favorites among our college-going generation bounded into my room. Hearing about my expected caller, she said, all in one breath: "Not *the* Monsignor Sheen! The kids at college think he's a wow. Will he give me an autograph and please may I meet him?"

Though it was known that Monsignor Sheen was coming to call, the last thing any of my family suspected was an imminent conversion. Perhaps this lack of suspicion was due to the wide variety of my acquaintance, summed up in a remark by one of the clan: "Gladys knows such funny people. You're likely to find anyone at all calling on her." Once they met the late American Indian author, Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance who, it was said, had all the Park Avenue dowagers and their debutante daughters in love with him. Another time, it was a young woman I had interviewed when she was on trial for murdering her lover in her Beekman Towers apartment, and who claimed

that my stories had helped to keep her from the electric chair. And, on a more recent occasion, Clare Boothe Luce, who also took their breath away by her incomparable loveliness.

So when the Monsignor arrived, since I had been ordered to remain in bed, I asked him if he would go into the living room and introduce himself to my husband and our young guest. Naturally I wondered what kind of impression my Catholic instructor would make on this first meeting with my Protestant family. Would there be an undercurrent of antagonism?

When Monsignor did not return I grew uneasy.

I waited. And I waited.

The wall clock in my room marked the passing of this sorely needed instruction hour.

Tension mounted.

What was going on? Could they be locked in a religious argument? Flinging on a robe, I started through my dressing room toward the living room. As I approached the door I heard gales of laughter. Standing unnoticed in the doorway, I surveyed the scene. The little group was seated cozily at the far end of the large room.

Monsignor Sheen was holding court—telling funny stories.

From my coign of vantage I watched the Pope's Domestic Prelate functioning as diplomat and man of the world. For the first time I observed in operation his effortless flexibility to newly met persons outside the Faith.

I was not unaware that like great luminaries of

hagiography, flashes of wit colored and vivified his utterances—even in the serious business of instruction. I knew also that, like Dom Chapman, he disliked the sanctimonious and believed that a man's religion was apt to be all the more sincere if he was able to make jokes about it. And standing there, I recalled the story of his passing a nun in a convent cloister, of greeting her and saying: "You are very grave, Sister. I hope your conscience is clear."

I knew also that his former private secretary, Dorothy Farmer, who later served Clare Boothe Luce in that same indispensable capacity, not infrequently put in a long-distance call for the sole purpose of sharing with her former chief an amusing story. I remembered also that once he had astonished me by saying: "Do you know what priests talk about when they are together? People imagine they discuss the state of their souls. Not at all! (Anyway that is too sacred for discussion.) We tell jokes!"

I had thought all this belonged to what I facetiously called the Camarilla surrounding Monsignor, but I saw now that this instinct for the funny side of things extended also to his worldly contacts. As I advanced slowly into the room, he was saying:

"The waitress, a pert little thing, took the orders of the businessmen first. Then coming up to me and taking in my monsignor regalia, inquired: 'And what'll you have, Cock-Robin?'"

While our young girl's face was puckered in laughter, he turned to my staunch Vermont Republican and they were off on that inexhaustibly congenial

subject: That Man in the White House. The Truman story! And from the hilarious way it was received I suspected this would not be the first nor the last time a Vermonter would hear it. The Federal Reserve Board would no doubt also relish it in Boston.

I thought it was time I retrieved my instructor.

In my room I told Monsignor I was disappointed that the hour I had so counted on had passed.

"There is always time," he said, "for God's work. Did you honestly think I had forgotten about your lesson? Next Saturday will be time enough for everything. Don't worry. God love you."

Would I never learn that the "sanctification of the now moment" could be stretched by this expert practitioner of it to encompass all emergencies?

While Monsignor had been with my family, the Sheen magnetism had worked its usual charm, but later our collegiate member, though pronouncing Monsignor "mad fun," issued the dire warning: "Even so, you needn't think we're going to let him convert you. If he does, I'll come down here and unconvert you."

Under her bantering and affectionate tone I was surprised that her words carried the connotation of antipathy. Then later that evening one of my young relatives from the South came to see me. We had always been very close and formerly, in his eyes, I could do no wrong.

His glance fell on a small Catholic card tucked inconspicuously in a mirror's frame with numerous

other pictures of my family, home, dogs, and garden. But none of these registered. Like a bird dog scenting game, he froze to a point.

"What on earth," he demanded, "are you doing with Catholic pictures *all over your room*? I certainly hope you aren't thinking of turning into a *Roman Catholic*!" And his tone indicated that the fate of Lot's wife would be far more desirable.

When I remained silent he went on, and with the sting of the devil behind it, delivered his tour de force:

"If you ever join the Catholic Church, I honestly think it will kill me."

No, it would not kill him. He played star halfback on his Varsity team. Moreover, when he had changed from the Episcopalian to the Presbyterian faith he had so counted on my support that he had not bothered to tell me about it.

How could such things be?

These two young persons represented the ideal product of American culture, education and environment. Believing themselves to be liberals, they would have been surprised and wounded to think they held any prejudices at all. Theirs was a social consciousness beyond the average. Though gay and popular, much of their time, energies and means were expended in service to their communities.

Yet they had voiced what is actually an unconscious bias against certain creeds which, despite our "some-of-my-best-friends" protestations, is still existent throughout our land. Frequently it is expressed only by a knowing tilt of the eyebrow, a shrug of the

shoulder, slight but unmistakable gestures of the hands.

I wondered if this subtle propaganda against religious freedom was one of the reasons why we were unable to sell our democratic principles to so-called less civilized peoples and thus realize one great, big, friendly world.

Surely it was one of the reasons for the recurrent savagery of war.

How much more would it take?

In words of the well-known political slogan, I wanted to cry out:

"Had enough?"

Enough of Hitler against the Jews? The Ku-Klux-Klanners against the Negro? Stalin against all religions? And, as far as I could see, everyone, save those within its fold, against the Roman Catholic Church?

Because I am so far removed from that state of sanctity which is called "detachment from creatures," being more dependent than most on sympathetic ties with family and friends, I longed to offer a defense on behalf of Holy Mother Church.

But I knew it would not only be premature but a futile tilting at windmills.

For I realized that this prejudgment of Catholicism was due to lack of knowledge. I knew also that there is no other specialized subject about which the uninformed are so cocksure they have all the answers as that vast and not uncomplex one of Roman theology.

I was shocked into silence. Until recently I, likewise, had been guilty of prejudice.

In my nostrils was a miasma like that which rose from rotted swamplands in the South, poisoning every living thing that tried to reach into God's clean sunlight and air. And I thought perhaps the stench of it might rise also to High Heaven and cause our Lord Christ to weep again as He had over Jerusalem because, after 2,000 years, we still "wouldest not."

Nor did I defend my personal relationship to the Church. As why indeed should I?

I was not threatening to divorce my husband; break up another woman's home; take to alcohol; or become a madam of a bordello. I was thinking only of allying myself with the oldest body of Christians on earth so that I might better carry out the Commandment: ". . . love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy soul; and thy neighbor as thyself."

I tried hard to understand the Protestant attitude. But even from the most worldly point of view I still could not find it *déclassé* if I should qualify for admission into such company as St. Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Fra Angelico, Pasteur—all the gifted Catholic artists, poets, philosophers and scientists of ancient and modern times.

We are, on both sides, a large family connection with unusual ties of loyalty and affection, and operate on that noninterference policy which in Vermont is known as letting the other fellow "do as he's of a mind to." And so I felt sure that once I had made my decision I should have their united support.

Nevertheless I realized, not without sadness, that

if my soul's search for God should end in that Church instituted by Christ on earth, it must be in the manner bespoken by St. John of the Cross: "the flight of the alone to the Alone."

19

Confession

SOMEWHERE in the inferno there must have been considerable annoyance and hurried consultations. For thus far the sniping expedition aimed at my plans to make my reception into the Church a gala had resulted only in relatively unimportant disappointments. These, seen in perspective and aided by that healthy sense of humor which is so much a part of the Catholic faith, I had been able to surmount. I could not know, of course, about those more formidable road blocks being shunted into position in an attempt to bar my final entrance into the City of God.

First the protein count plunged into the "fatality level." To keep me in life, my doctor ordered transfusions of the human albumin to be given every other day. The result—plasma reactions such as I had never known; convulsive chills and fever lasting almost from one treatment to the next. The up-time was deleted. Obviously it would be impossible to leave my room.

If I could not leave my room, how could I undergo the physical obligations and ceremonies scheduled to take place a week hence?

On Saturday Monsignor Sheen arrived at the usual time for my final instruction. Realizing how great would be his own disappointment, I tried to break the bad news as lightly as possible.

"We can't go through with it," I said, "on account of I can't get out of bed."

To my astonishment he was not the least put out.

"Oh, that's all right," he said calmly. "I was afraid this might happen, so I obtained special permission to receive you here at your bedside."

He said he would hear my general confession as well as my Profession of Faith; administer conditional Baptism on Saturday afternoon; and return the following morning to give me my First Communion.

I was completely bowled over. I knew that such dispensations were not easily come by; that they involved special permission. My own eligibility for such rarely granted privileges would never have occurred to me.

Hence I was reluctant to mention any further obstacles. But I had to point out that, even so, none of it would be possible, due to my medical regime which would not permit the long fast preceding Communion.

Said the imperturbable Monsignor: "Of course you must obey your doctor's orders. The Church is very practical and never asks any of her children to do 'beyond that ye are able.' I've known all along how ill you are and I also secured dispensation from fasting in your special case. I thought we might as well be prepared."

It was not the first time I was impressed with this

priest's consideration for the minutest details concerning souls entrusted to his care. But his having secured these dispensations before they were actually needed seemed to pass beyond thoughtfulness into the realm of prophecy.

A sudden thought struck me.

"Monsignor, would you mind telling me when you made these arrangements?"

A slight smile tugged at his mouth: "Oh, some time ago—the week before Christmas, as a matter of fact."

"But, Monsignor, you couldn't have! That was after I'd sent you that miserable letter saying it was all off."

"I know," he said, "but I had faith you would resume your instruction and come into the Church. Besides, I wanted you to have the privilege of receiving the Sacraments. In every way they will help you."

Surely this was the kind of faith which moved mountains. And as for those hellish road blocks, Monsignor wasted neither a huff nor a puff to blow them away. Indeed, as if oblivious of their existence, he went on in his usual brisk instructorial manner: "Now I shall give you your lesson on the Sacrament of Penance, commonly called Confession.

"There is nothing," he continued, "in the Church so misunderstood by those outside the fold as confession. But I can assure you it is not the horror they say it is!"

I told him I was glad to hear it, but just the same I dreaded the ordeal of making a detailed confession of my whole life's aberrations.

He laughed: "You poor child, think of your laboring

under such a delusion. Details are never given. The sins must be confessed in the abstract, devoid of all personalities, embellishments and descriptions. And as for the length of time it will take—why, it is possible for even a general confession to be made in a few minutes.”

“Not mine, Monsignor. I think the priest will have to take the whole day off.”

“No, no,” he protested, “confession is not like that. Once a lapsed Catholic who hadn’t been near the Church in fifty years made his confession to me in four minutes.”

“Oh, but he must have been a saint. Not like me.”

“On the contrary, the earnest resolve to do the will of God is the beginning of sanctity. Only when God ceases to be infinitely good and we begin to be infinitely wicked is there reason for despair.

“However,” Monsignor continued, “much of the preparation is done by the penitent before he goes to confession. He has made an earnest examination of conscience, is already sorry for his sins and is of a disposition to amend his life. But we’ll take such a man for an example. If he had sinned against impurity, he wouldn’t give names, dates, or places—indeed, he would not be allowed to do so. If he had stolen money, he would be told by the priest to pay it back if and as he can. If he doesn’t know from whom it was stolen, he is told to give a like amount to charity.”

Monsignor told me some of the laws of God may be broken in more than the literal connotation: The commandment “Thou shalt not kill” applies not only

to the murder of another human being. If an alcoholic knows the first drink will lead to an eventual binge, or if a hard drinker knows that he is likely to fall into besottedness and he continues these habits, he also breaks this commandment. For he has killed the image of God which is in each of us. Also, "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."

Concerning the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery," I was informed that there is a difference between desires and acts. "Desires are temptations and are perfectly human. If controlled by the will, put out of mind and not dwelt upon, they are not sins, they may even be occasions for merit."

In this connection I recalled a story attributed to Saint Philip Neri. On his seventieth birthday some young seminarians asked him when the desires of the flesh would be obliterated. It is said their holy director replied: "I think, sons, after the fifth, no the seventh, spadeful of earth has fallen on the grave."

"The Sacrament of Penance is really quite simple," continued Monsignor, "and can be summed up in five steps: Examination of Conscience; Contrition; Confession; Absolution; and Penance."

I mentioned the skepticism voiced most frequently by unbelievers: "All a Catholic has to do is run to Confession, be forgiven, run out, and commit the same sin all over again."

He nodded. "Yes, I know. It is again a question of ignorance and the unwillingness to become informed on the most elementary facts concerning the practices of the Church. As a matter of fact, Contrition is only

the first and perhaps the easiest step. Contrition must be backed up by an earnest resolution to amend one's life. If a Confessor knows that a penitent willfully refuses over and over again to avoid the occasion of sin—those persons and places which he knows lead him to repeat the sin—then obviously he is not using his will to co-operate with the supernatural grace given him by the Sacrament and he will be refused absolution. Likewise, absolution obtained under false pretenses—and any Catholic knows very well what these are—is rendered void."

When Monsignor spoke of penance, I told him the word had a sackcloth-and-ashes ring to the Protestant and sounded very forbidding.

He explained that was because in the early Church penances were quite rigorous. But today the penance given by the confessor generally consists of prayers and, on necessary occasions, acts of restitution.

"There are two kinds of sin—mortal and venial," he continued. "Mortal sin deprives us of God's friendship, endangers the eternal life of the soul." He cited as examples willful murder, adultery, theft of a considerable sum of money, lies that do serious injury to another.

He gave me the three rules for judging a mortal sin: grievous matter; sufficient reflection by the intellect before it is committed; full consent of the will.

Then, as always, my instructor steered the lesson to its personal application and asked whether I were still disturbed by any part of it.

I said it would be very embarrassing to speak of my sins to a strange priest.

He refuted this misconception: "You will not be speaking to 'a strange priest' or even to a priest humanly. He is Christ's representative in the confessional with the power bestowed by Our Lord on His apostles and their successors, when he said: 'Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.'

"People outside the Church," he went on with a hint of sarcasm edging his words, "think hearing confessions must be so very interesting. They imagine the priest takes some sort of morbid, vicarious pleasure in hearing the purple passages of a penitent's private life. Well, I can tell you he doesn't. There is a terrible monotony about human nature. The priest has heard it all so many times that he can tell as the confession begins just how it will go. Let anyone who envies the priest his job try sitting in a stuffy confessional box for five or six hours on Saturday, on the eves of feast days and First Fridays, turning over those 'worn coins of sin' and he will realize it is done only to carry on the blessed ministrations instituted by Christ."

I asked if the presence of a priest was always necessary to obtain forgiveness of one's sins.

"If a priest is unavailable, a man on his deathbed may obtain forgiveness by making an act of perfect contrition if he resolves to go to confession given the opportunity. Or, in the case of swift accidental

death, a man—even an unbeliever—by turning fullheartedly to God may ask and receive forgiveness.”

I was told that all Catholics are obliged to go to confession, not excluding priests, bishops, and even the Pope. Many, wishing to progress in their spiritual life, avail themselves of the Sacrament once a week. Some saintly souls go every day. It is obligatory for every Catholic to go to confession once a year. Failing to do so, he automatically excommunicates himself from the Church.

I learned also that sins confessed were held inviolable. Every priest is bound by the “seal of the confessional.” This vow forbids him, though under threat of death, to reveal any part of a confession even in the most general way. He is not even permitted to say that a certain person has been to him in confession when it would cast suspicion on a person. And not even the civil law can force a priest to give evidence from knowledge gained in confession.

Summing it up, Monsignor said: “This Sacrament is one of Our Lord’s greatest gifts to mankind. You see, God became Man and knew what is in man, so He instituted this gracious and loving rite not for His needs but for ours. It was His way of giving man a happy heart.”

Monsignor then gave me his blessing and said in parting: “Don’t worry about it. Don’t even think about it. Everything will be all right, I promise you.”

Did I hear the scamper of cloven hooves running away from my room and . . . down . . . down . . . down?

20

Pain of Conversion

EVEN if those young fiends had decamped from my doorstep I had reason, later, to suspect that it was only to go running with their tails between their legs to draw up reinforcements from their High Command.

And I could imagine that, reporting their latest failure, every inch of the infernal regions resounded with His Satanic Majesty's wrath: "First your sniping expedition missed its mark. Now your road blocks have crumbled like straws in the wind. There is a counterattack being waged by that trumpery which humans call prayer. It has given us considerable trouble before. If we are to keep this convert out of the clutches of the Enemy, we must launch that final assault which often succeeds when all other methods have failed—Operation Delay!"

And what a mighty maneuver it can be.

Just as I thought the way ahead had been cleared, I was plunged into sudden and unmitigated despair. The next days and nights were devoid of any consolation either human or divine.

Not just occasionally but permanently now:

I was isolated in a cold, blue void where neither light nor warmth could ever reach me.

I tried to find a way out of this.

At least the worsening of the physical state gave me the solitude for the private retreat I had planned. By meditation and prayer I would find my way back to those sun-lit vistas which all through life had rewarded my inner searching with glimpses of Reality and intimations of ineffable bliss.

Prayer? What on earth made me think I knew how to pray? I felt a self-conscious fool on my knees with only a dumb question mark to offer a God who had never seemed so far away.

Meditation? Surely the precious small books which my hands could reach in the dark could be counted on to help. They were old friends, simple and familiar aids to seekers of all faiths. I turned to St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, and *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Meaningless jargon! Only by restraint did I keep from hurling them violently across the room.

So back I turned to my favorite convert literature. All the soaring passages, which had formerly lifted me to mountaintops, were as though they had been set down in invisible ink. Only the pain and agony of conversion remained.

Like dolorous, heavy-laden measures of a funeral dirge, the words reverberated in my thoughts day and night, plunging me down, down, down:

Cardinal Newman, even after his conviction that his salvation depended on joining the Church, and on the verge of "going over to Rome":

"I have no existing sympathies with Roman Catholics. I hardly ever was at one of their services. I know none of them and I do not like what I hear of them. How much I am giving up—sacrifices irreparable. Nor am I conscious of any feeling, enthusiastic or heroic. I have nothing to support me. . . ."

Dom John Chapman, during those last desolate days at that deserted English seaside, wrestling out his ultimate decision:

"My difficulties are a real terror and agony. I am in a great strait. I feel no attraction, only fear at the darkness and the complete change like death which threatens me."

Paul Claudel, France's illustrious statesman and poet:

"For four years I used all my resistance. The great crisis of my life had come and it was a mental agony."

Sheila Kaye-Smith, Sussex author, contemplating her conversion:

"For twelve years I had been repelled by the austerity of the Catholic Church. And for a long time I was unable to find happiness in what I was doing."

Clare Boothe Luce, with her compellingly apt but sorrowful phrase, wrung from her own experience:

"Good Friday converts. Most of us enter through the gates of pain."

Why did these words take on such sudden meaning—standing like macabre silhouettes against a bleak November sky? Was it because, like all dramatic crises in one's life, one had to live them to make them real?

But was it not, after all, happiness that I was seeking?

So I had another go at the convert literature. I would force those invisible words to light up my mind again.

Cardinal Newman's answer, shortly after he had "gone over to Rome," to critics of the Catholic Faith:

"Their arguments do not warm me, or enlighten me: they do not take away the winter of my desolation, or make the buds unfold and the leaves grow within me, and my moral being rejoice."

Ah, but his new faith did.

Dom Chapman writing, three weeks after his conversion, to a Catholic priest:

"As you can imagine I am intensely happy."

Paul Claudel's admission to a friend after he was "inside":

"You will never approach happiness without approaching its source, which is God."

Sheila Kaye-Smith:

"It was only a question of waiting for the heart's release, for the day which came surely, when I could say, 'I rejoice at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the House of the Lord.'"

Clare Boothe Luce:

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh with the morning."

Even so, as the time for my own decision drew nearer the darkness deepened.

Then a strange thing happened. From that black and bottomless pit, I knew deep within me what the outcome would be. Even as my feet were chained against crossing over that alien threshold; even as my heart cried out for the comfort of a less stringent religion; even as my every thought rebelled against submission of my will to the stern decrees of a wrathful Jehovah; even as every fiber of my being awoke in sensual awareness of renunciation; even as my soul stood in ashes and my eyes were blind with unshed tears:

I knew I would go on with it.

And I knew, too, that there was nowhere else to go. If this door were closed to me by my perversity, I would literally go out into utter nothingness.

For while resistance was strongest I sensed in the depths of my being that for me this was the final, complete, and only answer. Here the spiritual means to full realization of those mystical glimpses I had had of the Infinite. Here would be resolved the futile questioning which had, beyond all exterior pursuits, been the *leit motif* of my life. Here the only reasonable

goal of existence, one which the saints had shown was even possible here and now—direct apperception and experience of God.

After all, it was the Church which had given the world the greatest number of saints. However dimly we grope and ineffectually strive, in the saints is realized the object God had in creating us—all of us. Here then I knew was a definite *modus operandi*. I knew also in the world we faced that only as each one of us grows in spiritual perfectibility could the gross error of our times be dissolved into moral and eternal values. As Nobel prize author Sigrid Undset, herself a convert, said: "All Christians suffer for the guilt of each single one of us before God and his neighbor."

Intimations of the union which makes us all "members one of another" had come to me long ago—from writers not in the Church: John Donne's "Do not ask for whom the bell tolls: it tolls for thee"; and Eugene O'Neill's soldier looking into the face of the enemy he had slain and being shockingly aware that it was his own face he looked into.

This conversion then for me had now become motivated by Something beyond the value to the individual. Was it to be given ultimately in one great surge of love—as one's own small crucifixion—a willing sacrifice?

How cheap and tawdry seemed my former motives. Get peace. Get consolation. Get certainty of Eternal Life. Get happiness for one's self. Get. Get. Get. The Battle Hymn of the twentieth century.

Very well. Let there be no angel's tap upon my

shoulder; no spiritual exhilaration; no ecstasies; no burst of light that never was on land or sea.

I was going on with it.

But the end was not yet.

Because I am not by nature given to shilly-shallying, once an important decision has been reached, I could not understand what happened next.

As though my stout resolution to be received into the Church less than a week hence were the signal, the full batteries of Hell opened up. And to my utmost astonishment I became deadlocked in immobility.

To be sure, I recalled Monsignor Sheen's warning that most converts experience this last-minute temptation to postponement. He had said:

"That the convert is not ready is one of the most potent arguments of evil. While it is true that there can be no conversion without grace and man cannot redeem himself by his own power or reason, man *can* use his will to co-operate with the grace of God. After all, grace is a gift and any gift can be rejected. Even your earnest desire for God can end in frustration."

I recalled his words all right. But they clicked over as mechanically as those pictures on a slot machine when you have failed to hit the jack pot. Now all my nickels were gone and my Spirit's pockets were as empty as those of a last year's overcoat.

Only one sentence retained any meaning: "*There can be no conversion without grace.*"

How right he was!

But until now I would not acknowledge it.

I had tried to go ahead trusting, as had others, that full grace would come once I was "inside." I had accepted the counsel of the mystical writers that the first step towards Realization was a literal getting out of the cave, as it was for Plato's prisoners. I had attempted that deliberate act of the will which I reasoned was sometimes necessary for the turning of the "dark shadow within the self to the Light."

But, in today's jargon, it simply would not wash.

Face facts. I had not the motive power of supernatural grace to permit me to enter the Church, come Saturday.

And Saturday was only five days off.

"Don't let yourself be rushed," whispered a sly voice in my ear, "you can go into the Church any time. Better put it off before it's too late!"

And from the ground of the soul came the answer:

"If you put it off, it might very well be too late."

And sadly I knew that once this moment had passed, it would not come again—ever again in life; as it had not for many others who at the last had procrastinated with the excuse of "some other time."

I recalled the Catholics' faith in prayer which they employ—not when all other methods have failed; not as a last, but as a first resort.

Certainly a great many prayers were being offered on my behalf.

I thought of Monsignor Sheen's priestly offering of his Mass every morning, as is his custom for each of his converts under instruction; of the touching long distance message from Avery Dulles from his seminary

where he was studying for the priesthood, telling our mutual friend that he and all the Seminarians would be offering their daily Communion for my intention; of Mother Judge in the Cenacle, day and night praying, praying; of Father Wilfred Thibodeau, Superior of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, whose sanctity and wisdom have made him spiritual director of the intelligentsia and who is called "Bishops' Confessor." Though he was unknown to me then, he also had sent word that prayers were being offered for my conversion in that perpetual adoration to God which is the primary purpose of his Community.

"Oh, yeah?" jeered a fiendish voice. "And what good has it done?" And with the utmost subtlety, "Doesn't it seem obvious that if the supplication of these dedicated men and women has gone unanswered, your entering the Church is *not* God's will for you after all—at least for the present?"

Reluctantly, I had to admit that even though I had made my decision, some force beyond myself had me now in such an iron grip that it was impossible to carry it out.

Conflict! Panic! Suddenly I was seized with man's atavistic compulsion to take flight.

I would catch the first plane for Vermont!

Because one of the dangers of hypoproteinemia is the inability to fight off the slightest infection, I had been warned that exposure to the freezing March temperature of our Vermont town, almost touching the Canadian border, might prove fatal. Moreover, for the present I had been ordered to remain in bed.

Physical danger? Pooh! What was that? What indeed was death compared to this chasm which threatened to open and engulf me?

Nothing, absolutely nothing mattered but to get away.

And I was going.

21

I Meet a Lady

It was after midnight.

I thought I remembered a 2 A.M. plane leaving for Vermont.

I would be on it.

From the topmost closet shelf I grabbed down an overnight case. There was no time to pack. Well, I would throw in a warm wool dress and board the early morning plane wearing my nightgown under my enveloping mink coat. No one would be the wiser.

As I tossed the case onto the bed a small object tumbled out at my feet. I picked it up, uttering an oath against delay. The light caught the gleam of imitation pearls. It was the cheap rosary I had bought in St. Peter's Square just prior to my interview with Pope Pius XI and which the Holy Father had blessed for me.

Of all times to be reminded!

In any case I had never used it.

The Rosary, like all prayers, is offered by man to God but is used primarily as a devotion to the Virgin

Mary, and despite Monsignor Sheen's advice I had never overcome my Protestant aversion to employing an intermediary to approach God.

I could hear him saying now, almost pleadingly: "Pray to Our Lady. She will help you."

Before I knew what I was doing, I was on my knees. The beads slipped silently under my fingers and I was saying haltingly those unfamiliar words:

"Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women . . . Holy Mary, Mother of God . . ."

I got only so far and stopped. I knew then that Mary was not only the Mother of God, as the Rosary proclaimed her to be, but the Mother of all men, made so by that most gracious act in history—the bestowal of her by her Son as He hung dying on the cross.

And I knew that she was my Mother, also.

Kneeling there I was transported into a supernatural dimension beyond thought and logic, time and space. My body was a part of her body. I felt the pulsating throb of her heart. It was her blood which pounded in my veins, her life which flowed into mine. I was part of earth and sky and grasses; of sun and stars and rocks and rivers and all living creatures upon this plane and those beyond. I was in the universal Womb of Creation.

For the first time I felt the warm, enfolding tenderness of maternal love. Here was healing for that trauma of being an unwanted child which, for pride's sake, I had carried unacknowledged all through life. Here was a union rendered inviolable from such ac-

cidents as being rejected by human love or the severing of the flesh by death. Here a pure bond of love reaching from now into infinity.

And I knew that never again should I feel lost or lonely. I had only to reach out to be gathered with unspeakable tenderness under her mantle. And I knew that it was she who would lead me into our Father's House.

After a night of unaccustomed refreshing sleep I awakened to a new world. Outside, one of those spring-greeting days of enameled blues and gold. Inside, tranquillity and a sense of joyous expectancy.

The conflict was over.

In Heaven there must have been that rejoicing over the "one sinner" of which Jesus spoke, and in the inferno acknowledgment of ignominious defeat. To be sure, at no time had I caught a glimpse of His Satanic Majesty or his busy little emissaries, for as C. S. Lewis tells us, they are not comic figures with horns and tails, dressed up in red tights.

Whether or not there is a manifestation of the spirit of evil, as some of the medieval writers have claimed, I do not know. Nor does it greatly matter. But as long as man lives in his fallen nature separated from supernatural Grace there is, in the individual and in the world, a mighty contest constantly being waged against the forces of evil and good.

And good had triumphed. Not of my own powers, for "ye of yourselves can do nothing; it is the Father that dwelleth within who doeth the works."

Neither had I seen Our Lady. But I knew that henceforth she would be as real to me as she is to some four hundred million Catholics, and that eventually, as she prophesied in her *Magnificat*, all generations would call her blessed.

Here was certitude as there had been for that hard-bitten and brilliant Communist editor, Douglas Hyde, when all other avenues to Christianity eluded him. In a mean little East End chapel in London he had knelt before Our Lady and come away with that shattering conclusion:

"I had not been talking to nothing."

Four days remained until Saturday. This would be the day of my being received into the Church. The following day—Palm Sunday, 1950—I would receive my First Communion.

During that time I experienced the beautiful practicality of Mary Mediatrix as expressed in St. Bernard's *Memorare* . . . "never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored thy help or sought thy intercession, was left unaided . . ."

Now, in reverse, no incident concerning my conversion but was miraculously affected.

Day and night I was the recipient of what Catholics call "sensible consolations." I told Monsignor that I felt exactly as if I were walking on rose petals and that their perfume seemed to rise up within me. Didn't he think this was a most extraordinary experience? For answer he told me of St. Teresa's "divine tastes," and quoted from the Saint of Avila's writings: "The soul is conscious of a certain fragrance as if within its

inmost depths were a brazier sprinkled with sweet perfume."

And what a manifestation of tangible graces!

Though my husband could not be present, a letter which came from him was no slight miracle in itself.

He had written:

. . . If you are sure this is what you wish please do not hesitate to make the change. My own thought about it is that you will, without doubt, experience spiritual, mental and physical help and anything you do which will provide you with these blessings meets entirely with my approval.

Certainly no one I know has ever made so careful a study of various religions and creeds as you, and to have found the answer must be to you a profound relief and satisfaction.

My prayers you have and my constant and deep love.

Here was generosity and true understanding to heal the hurts I had received from those outside the fold and to serve as a shield against future opposition.

Then, due to an unexpected shift in schedule, one of my sponsors returned. Elsie Sloan Farley, with her decorator's taste and knowledge of Catholic protocol, would attend to all arrangements and serve as my Godmother. And only one sponsor was needed.

Though I had attempted to offer them up, aesthetically I could have wished that those personal adornments for my being received into the Church had not gone awry.

Who but Mary, with feminine intuition, could have set them right also?

My reliable hairdresser, Marietta, suddenly appeared in my room and seemed to make hair grow where there was no hair! She transformed the hideous crew cut into one of the most flattering hair-dos of my life. She shared my secret and had brought along a jazz band in the form of porcelain Easter rabbits to add a jolly note to the festivities.

Though the ceremonies would take place with the convert in bed, there was still the problem of what to wear—only more so!

Over the phone I confided my plight to my friend and personal shopper, Mrs. C. Douglas Despard, whose international clientele testified to her infallible taste.

"But of course," she said, "I have exactly the right thing for you. It came to me only this morning—a Madonna-blue satin robe with Alençon lace. I have only one and it is size 14!"

It was decorous; it was becoming; it was what, under the circumstances, I myself should have chosen.

Due to the low stage of my health, it was decided to keep my conversion a secret until such time as I might be better able to cope with the deluge of letters which was sure to follow the announcement, especially from those sections where I had lived and where my by-line had made me a public figure.

Hence, only a scant dozen people knew about the forthcoming event.

There was still the matter of flowers. From my mother I had inherited the conviction that flowers were not a luxury but an essential, and going the Japanese one better, I was quite sure that, having only three pennies, two would go for hyacinths and one for bread!

For such a festive occasion it gave me an Orphan Annie-ish feeling to have to order flowers for myself with a card, "To Gladys with love from Gladys." If I could have announced my news, all my friends, if only as a gesture of *noblesse oblige*, would have showered me with enough flowers to make my room look like a Park Avenue florist shop.

But I need not have worried, for on Saturday morning those dozen Catholics who knew of the event stretched literally into a Baker's dozen! And they were more than enough.

Early that morning a huge box arrived. Dozens and dozens of Easter lilies flown in from Bermuda—from playwright Rosemary Casey, who greeted me with a message, characteristically merry: She had called out "the Varsity team of angels" to attend me.

From Clare Boothe Luce, making a Holy Year pilgrimage to Rome, a rosary "especially blessed" for me "right from the Holy Father's lap!" her card declared.

And Mother Judge—surely not Mother Judge whose vows included poverty! But with her felicitations came a daintily wrought silver crucifix, all the more precious because she had used it in her own devotions.

Two recent converts of Father Thibodeau, knowing what the day would mean, sent small white flowers for the altar.

From Gretta Palmer, a choice wall font and holy water she had brought for me from Lourdes.

An hour before the event, scheduled for 5 P.M., Elsie Sloan Farley arrived accompanied by a retinue bearing mysterious packages. A fairy godmother as well as my spiritual godmother!

From an olivewood box she produced a gift she had found for me in Rome—an exquisite carved-wood 16th Century Madonna. My first, and it would ever be intimately near me. From another box a cobwebby, ivory-toned veil of real lace to cover my hair while receiving Holy Communion. As every woman knows, there is nothing more flattering—certainly far more becoming than anything John-Frederics could have designed for me. And still other boxes held beautiful articles for the altar she would improvise.

Against the windows with their drawn draperies she massed the Easter lilies. On a small table she placed a "fair linen cloth"; two tall crystal and silver candlesticks to hold the blessed candles, and matching containers for the white freesia and sweet peas; the Holy Crucifix Monsignor had given me; and over it all Our Lady holding the Holy Child.

Five o'clock. My room was transformed into a sanctuary. The only light was the amber gleam of candle-light; the white flowers seemed to sing a *Te Deum*. My Godmother, with a great lace shawl enveloping her dark hair and looking like a Raphael madonna,

stood with a lighted taper in her hand to greet the priest. In the world's busiest metropolis we were enfolded by cloistral serenity.

Sharply at five Monsignor Sheen arrived.

With his voice making the ancient Latin phrases as sonorous as organ music and with the loving devotion which he gives to all the Sacraments, he heard my Profession of Faith and administered conditional Baptism. For the Saints' names it is customary to take in Baptism, I had chosen Maria Francesca.

My sponsor withdrew. Monsignor drew up a chair close to my bedside and with the utmost tact and delicacy heard my confession. With bowed head I spoke to him as I would to Christ. I had no wish to withhold anything. With the liberating words, "*Ego Te Absolvo*," I received absolution for all the sins of my life.

In less than three or four minutes it was over.

I felt the winds of the Spirit blow sweet and clean across the sin-darkened areas. It was as though I walked through a flower-scented meadow of a May morning where larks sprang up and sang overhead. I felt as newly born as the first creature who ever trod God's universe on the first day of Creation.

Monsignor then left, saying he would return early the following morning to give me my First Communion.

I was alone, yet not alone; for the room seemed filled with celestial presences. No outside word or worldly thought intruded into this atmosphere of sanctity. Permeating the inner recesses of my being

were the graces of the Sacraments by which I had been made a Christian in the tradition inaugurated by Christ Himself.

All through the night Our Lady and the Child kept vigil amidst the fragrant lilies.

On Sunday morning when I awakened, golden sunlight was streaming across the altar and the Madonna had now for a backdrop her favorite blue in a cloudless sky.

No sponsors are necessary for First Communion. So I left the door off the latch and waited for Monsignor to arrive. Even now he would be removing the Host from the tabernacle, placing it in the sheltering pyx within the burse which, suspended from a cord around his neck, would rest against his heart.

On his sacred errand the priest would speak no word, his mind uplifted in prayer.

Monsignor let himself in and in silence placed the Blessed Sacrament upon the altar. Kneeling, he repeated the Communion ritual and elevated the Host:

"Behold the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the World."

Drawing near, he placed the holy wafer upon my tongue, whispering the ancient formula: "May the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul unto everlasting life."

God for that moment had been called down from high Heaven and was incarnate in the form of the consecrated Host and I received the Divine Presence.

I bowed my head in silence and thanksgiving.

It was then that it happened.

Suddenly it burst upon my uplifted consciousness.
The Figure!

Though I did not see Him as I had when He had stood at my bed when I was a little child, I knew—in that irrefutable way of personal experience—that then and now It was Our Lord.

It was He who had watched over my tumultuous career, calling me back insistently whenever I separated myself from His love by immersion into the glamour of the world's illusion.

It was He who had given me His Blessed Mother to be my Mother also.

He who had given me His Sacraments. By Baptism and Penance He had restored in me the innocence of that little child so that I might see Him—not with the eyes of the flesh—but now and each time I received Him in Holy Communion, with the eyes of the Spirit.

And, finally, He had made me a living cell of His Mystical Body—His Church on earth—and in so doing I felt that He had also given me Heaven.

At last, I knew.

Feast of All Saints
November 1, 1950
Ritz-Carlton Hotel
New York.